

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*

February 2023

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.

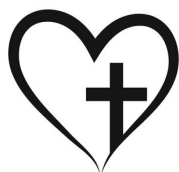
CORE VALUES:

Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

Fr. Stavros' Message

How Is Your Overall Health?

Physical Health



Yikes, most of us as we get older hate addressing this question! Because the answer inevitably is either "not good" or "not as good as it should be." I remember when I was a freshmen in college, I was playing soccer on the varsity team. Our practices were so intense that I would lose 5-6 pounds at a practice (mostly water of course). When we weren't practicing, we were eating, putting enough "fuel" into us so as to be ready for the next practice. It was not unusual for me to eat an entire large pizza for dinner, washed down by an ice cream sundae. And still I was losing weight. Thankfully, when the season ended, I realized that these eating habits I had could not continue and they didn't. My roommate was a fitness freak, so it was not uncommon for us to run about five miles a day. Thus, I never really gained much weight in college.

The weight gain started when I went to the seminary in Boston and the combination of cold weather (which made running a no-go after early October) and depression (homesickness, and overall struggle at the Seminary) contributed to me putting on 15 pounds that first year. Life, laziness, slower metabolism, gluttony—you name it—has led to me putting

on the rest. I'm somewhere between the "not good" and "not as good as it should be" if I'm being honest. This is the physical side of health, and I would venture to say most of us have the same story. It just manifests itself in different ways, like high blood sugar (diabetes), high cholesterol, high blood pressure which in turn become more serious things like heart disease.

Mental Health

How about mental health? When we were children, most people's mental health was great. Life consisted of playing with toys, elementary school was not very high stakes, forgiveness came easy (remember fighting on the sandlot and then five minutes later being best friends again). The influence of our parents and the experience of childhood shaped who we have become as adults. Just as all of us have challenges to our physical health—we all get sicknesses, some of which are small and some are significant—we ALL have challenges to our mental health. Going to a doctor or dentist for a check-up is a normal part of life. Going to a doctor when one is physically sick is expected. Yet, going for a check-up for mental health or going to a mental health specialist to discuss a challenge or difficulty still carries a stigma. There is the concern "what

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will other people think” and I think there is even a self-stigma, i.e. “what will I think of myself if I admit that I have some mental health concerns?”

I know someone who had strep throat, something we’ve all had, something that is rather common and very treatable. For some reason, she didn’t go to the doctor for many weeks. By the time she went, she was so sick she was admitted immediately to a hospital where she died the next day. That death was probably avoidable. Something small became something big and ultimately became something fatal. I think mental health sometimes works the same way. A small problem, when ignored, becomes a large and potentially debilitating problem, when it really didn’t need to be. Some people need mental health care to cope with a trauma, like someone dying. This is often a temporary setback. Obviously, we don’t necessarily “get over” a loved one dying, but the initial shock and trauma of a loss can be worked through and lessened. And there are some issues that become lifelong struggles, like a confidence problem, a problem with anxiety or depression. There are some struggles that are identified diseases of the mind, like being bi-polar or schizophrenic. With therapy and medication people with conditions like these can still live normal lives, just like people who take blood pressure or cholesterol medications still live normal lives.



Spiritual Health

Then there is spiritual health. The human being is comprised of body, mind and spirit. We’ve discussed physical health and mental health. Spiritual health is also a challenge for each person. There are certain illnesses of the spirit, just like there are illnesses of the body and the mind. There is no stigma to getting a cold or the flu—these things happen to everyone. There is an increasing awareness of men-

tal health challenges, and while there is still unfortunately a stigma to mental health treatment, at least there is an awareness that certain mental health problems can benefit from specific treatments. In the spiritual realm, not only is there somewhat of a stigma (from others or from oneself) that there might be a spiritual problem, there is also a lack of awareness that people actually suffer from a spiritual problem.

One spiritual problem we ALL have is that we all suffer from succumbing to temptation. What causes us to succumb to temptation? That is probably most easily summed up by saying that we all suffer from a lack of understanding of our value. We don’t understand that we are created in the image and likeness of God so we are of infinite value. We allow ourselves to devalue ourselves when we succumb to temptation. We allow others to devalue us when they encourage us to fall to temptation. One of two things happen when we habitually succumb to temptation. The first is that we feel shame. We don’t like ourselves or what we do. The second is that we feel we can’t overcome the temptation, or even worse, we don’t want to overcome the temptation, so we just take a “screw it” attitude and keep on doing it.

Shame is a problem because it causes us to feel guilty, sad, and unworthy. Jesus said in John 10:10 “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” Sin, shame, guilt, sadness and feelings of unworthiness keep us from having that abundant life that Jesus wants for us to have.

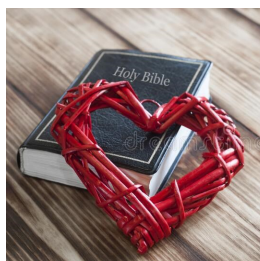
Some Special Things Coming in the Month of February

The month of February in our parish is going to address all of these issues. Why February? Because most of February this year will be “The Triodion” on the liturgical calendar. The “Triodion” is the 22-day period which precedes Great Lent each year. Pascha is April 16. Palm Sunday is April 9. Great Lent begins Monday, February 27. Triodion begins on Sunday, February 5. The four Sundays of Triodion have four specific lessons—The Publican and the Pharisee (February 5), the Prodigal Son (February 12), The Last Judgment (February 19) and Forgiveness Sunday (February 26). Each of these Sundays has a specific lesson to prepare us for the journey of Great Lent.

We will learn about humility from the Publican and the Pharisee. We will learn about Repentance from the Prodigal Son. We will learn about the importance of good works from the Sunday of the Last Judgment. And we will learn about forgiveness on Forgiveness Sunday.

The Need for Evaluation

This year at St. John, we are going to take these four Sundays a step further. The Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, the theme will be “The Need for Evaluation.” Because before one heads off to the doctor, the counselor or the priest for healing of body, mind and soul, one must see the need in himself or herself for healing. Our first evaluation that we are “sick” doesn’t come from the doctor, it comes from ourselves. The doctor helps figure out the cause and cure of sickness. The initial diagnosis that one is sick usually comes from the patient.



Wear Red for Healthy Hearts

The Sunday of the Prodigal Son, the theme will be about physical health. Every year, the Sunday closest to Valentine’s Day, we have “wear red” Sunday. This is

kind of a fun day where we all wear the same color to church, in honor of healthy heart month. Yes, we’re probably going to have some not-the-most-heart-healthy-food for lunch—it’s Super Bowl Sunday—but the theme of the sermon will be about getting our hearts prepared for Great Lent.

Healthy Minds and a Special Presentation on February 19

The Sunday of the Last Judgment, our theme is going to be about healthy minds. We are going to have a short presentation/Q & A after church with some mental health professionals that are part of our parish. (Please see the flyer in the Messenger). We’ve been thinking about doing this for a number of years. The point of this seminar is just to let people know simply what kinds of things mental health professionals do. What does it mean to go to a therapist or counselor? Does one have to be in therapy for years? How much does it cost? What kinds of things happen in counseling? Does everyone in therapy end up on meds? Who can benefit from counseling?

During January, we had a blood pressure screening day after church one Sunday. Our nursing ministry set up a table on one side of the hall, and people walked over and had their blood pressure checked. I did. I didn’t feel any stigma doing that. Some people came just out of curiosity to see what theirs was. Some maybe came

out of concern—theirs had been high and they wanted to see if it came down. But there was no stigma, no gossiping “ooh, look at who’s having their blood pressure checked,” none of that. On February 19, we will have this short presentation in the Zaharias Room. We’re doing it in there because unlike the blood pressure check, which can be done in a loud room filled with people talking, this presentation should be done where it is quiet, so people can hear. So, if you want to hear more about mental health, because you are curious or because you think YOU might need some help, or someone else that you know, please come and look into this. There should be no stigma attached to anyone who walks into the room.

Healthy Spirits

The last Sunday of February will be dedicated to healthy spirits. This makes sense, as it immediately precedes Great Lent, which kicks off the next day. At a meeting of Sunday school teachers in January, we were discussing how we don’t really encourage religious education enough in our homes. We have a very good Sunday school program, and on Sunday, February 26, we are going to have our annual pre-Lent retreat for our students. We decided that concurrent with this, we should also include our parents. As soon as church is over, we are inviting our Sunday school parents to a seminar in the Zaharias Room. To talk about how to get more out of the Lenten experience in your homes.

As for everyone who does not have children in Sunday school, the sermon that Sunday will also focus on healthy souls as we enter the period of the Great Lent. *My intention is to get the March Messenger out a few days early, so that the Lenten materials and schedule will be in there and you’ll get it right before the start of Great Lent. We are going to have the usual schedule of services, a*

OVERALL HEALTH



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Wednesday evening program, a family Lenten calendar, etc. So look for the March Messenger a few days early and read through it before Great Lent starts. Even though our next issue of *The Messenger* will give more details about Lent, it is not too early to start getting ahead on your work, so that you can leave more time for worship during Lent. It is not too early, or ever too early, to consider going to confession, to offering repentance to God and to making a new start in your spiritual walk, a renewed commitment to God and our Christian faith.

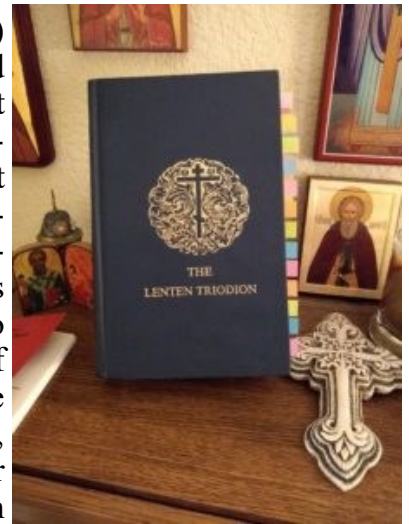
Belonging is a Good Thing

One of the things that makes Orthodoxy “Orthodoxy” is the concept of belonging. We belong to a parish, a Metropolis, an Archdiocese, and ultimately to Christ. Orthodoxy is practiced the same way around the world. There is no “independent” Orthodox Church or a “spiritual but not religious” Orthodox Christian. Orthodoxy is about belonging. The world is very much into “the self.” As in spirituality can be whatever a particular person wants it to be. And conforming to values, norms, standards, morals, etc. that are contrary to our freedom of self is seen as tyrannical. Christians are now increasingly being seen as the “tyrants” of society.

The idea of “belonging” to a doctor is not seen as abnormal. Those who go through life absorbed only with the “self” are probably going to end up unhealthy, because our physical health is intertwined with belonging, being connected, to a team of medical professionals—doctor, dentist, pharmacist, counselor. Likewise, our spiritual health is not a matter of self-interpretation. It is a matter of belonging somewhere, because Christianity is expressed in community. The community is where we gather to worship. The community is what rallies around us in our most important moments—baptism, marriage, death. The community is what works together to serve humanity. I can’t organize a service project and complete it on my own, but I can do it in the context of community. The community is what works together to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because left out of my own, especially during a rough season of life, I might get a warped view of Christ or I might abandon Him altogether. This is not likely to happen in the context of community.

The month of February offers many opportunities to gather in community. The aforementioned seminars on February 19 (mental health) and February 26

(Sunday school parents) will also be augmented by a men’s retreat (February 18—see flyer), a women’s retreat (in March), and as February ends, by the Lenten journey of services that lead us each year to a greater sense of Christ, a greater sense of our own spirituality, and hopefully a greater sense of purpose, which leads to renewal, which leads to rejoicing.



It’s hard to believe that Lent is right around the corner. And each year, it seems that this journey becomes even more important. I’m definitely on the down side of Lenten journeys I will have in my life. There are more of them in my rearview mirror than on my horizon. So, as I get older, I savor them more. But in this complicated world, which gets more and more complicated with each passing year, I feel like I need it more, like we need it more. Our community is doing as much as it possibly can to help all of us to become more committed to Christ.

The purpose of Triodion is to help us evaluate ourselves, and this year, we have ample opportunities in February to evaluate ourselves in mind, body and spirit. So that when Lent kicks off, we have a solid plan of how to grow in these areas. So that when Pascha comes, there is truly something to rejoice about. Seven weeks spent making new habits that will lead to a renewed you. And that all starts with a month of evaluation, which is the Triodion and some special things at our church afford us the opportunity to do this February.

With love in the Lord,
+Fr. Stavros

“Grant me to See my own Errors”

Yea, Lord and King! Grant me to see my own errors and not to judge my brother, for Thou are blessed unto ages of ages. Amen.”

-St. Ephraim the Syrian

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
Blessed Month of February.

On the 27th of this month will be Clean Monday, the day that Orthodox Christians around the world collectively start Great Lent. There is a common practice amongst Orthodox Christians to not eat anything on the first day of Lent, and in some monastic communities, the monks do not eat anything for three days. Either in the world or in monasteries, services are held, fasts start, and the forty day stretch to Holy Week begins - in a sense, Clean Monday is the commencement of our journey to Pascha. But this journey actually started on Sunday, January 15 with the Gospel reading of the Ten Lepers.

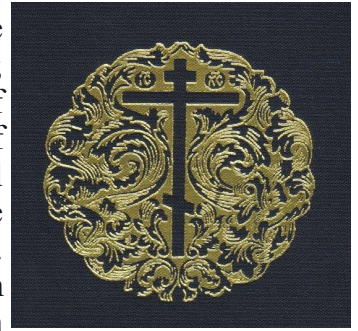
Fr. Romanos Karanos, Parish Priest of the Annunciation Greek Orthodox in Brockton, MA and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Byzantine Liturgical Music and Director of the Byzantine Music Program wrote beautifully and precisely in his sermon on January 22:

“Right after our Lord was baptized in the Jordan River, he started calling people to repent. Soon the Church will open in front of us the period of repentance par excellence: Triodion and Great Lent. This beautiful period of the year is heralded by three Sundays, which take their names from the Gospel pericopes assigned to them: Sunday of the Healing of the Ten Lepers [January 15], Sunday of Zacchaeus, [January 22], and Sunday of the Canaanite Woman [January 29]. The Church chose these three pericopes to prepare us for Triodion very wisely. In the incident of the healing of the ten lepers, we are taught that the spiritual life and our struggle for repentance is nothing without gratitude to God and to our fellow humans. The rather bizarre incident in Jericho involving Zacchaeus teaches us that true repentance starts with a burning desire to see the Lord, to experience Him with all our being. The healing of the pagan woman’s daughter is a lesson about the tremendous power of faith.”

On February 5, the Orthodox Church starts the period of Triodion or preparation. The physical book called the Triodion can be translated as the “Book of Three Odes” (Kallistos Ware), and contains “the cy-

cle of the Psalter and the other Scriptural readings; and secondly, the cycle of liturgical hymnography - of canons, stichera, sessional hymns and the like” (Kallistos Ware).

“What do we find, then, in this book of preparation that we term the Lenten Triodion? It can most briefly be described as the *book of the fast*. Just as the children of Israel ate the ‘bread of affliction’ (Deut. 16:3) in preparation for the Passover, so Christians prepare themselves for the celebration of the New Passover by observing a fast” (Kallistos Ware).



During this time of preparation, the Church chose wisely the Gospel readings before the start of Great Lent: Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee (February 5), Sunday of the Prodigal Son (February 12), Sunday of Judgment (February 19), and the Sunday of Forgiveness (February 26). Each Gospel in their message is different, but each of them revolves around the same theme, repentance and forgiveness. The Publican acknowledges his wrong doing, while the Pharisee judges; the Prodigal Son returns home and repents for the sins he committed against his father, while his brother is presumably upset, jealous and critical due to his brothers welcoming back home; the righteous inherit the Kingdom of Heaven because they served their brethren and the Lord, while those who didn’t love their brethren and the Lord “will go away into eternal punishment;” and lastly, those who forgive their brethren will be forgiven by the Lord, and those who do not forgive their brethren will not be forgiven by the Lord.”

There is a prayer during Lent from St. Ephraim the Syrian that reads as follows:

“O Lord and Master of my life! Take from me the spirit of sloth, faint-heartedness, lust of power, and idol talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to Thy servant.

Yea, Lord and King! Grant me to see my own errors and not to judge my brother, for Thou are blessed unto ages of ages. Amen.”

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This prayer is read at nearly every single Lenten service during the forty-day fast and Holy Week. The reason for this constant repetition is to keep at the front of our minds, repentance.

But, I'd like to focus on the last line of this beautiful prayers:

"Yea, Lord and King! Grant me to see my own errors and not to judge my brother, for Thou are blessed unto ages of ages. Amen."

Lately, I feel like I just can't get away from judgment.

If you turn on the TV, every news station is judging and even making fun of our past and current politicians; a bishop or priest says something someone doesn't like or disagrees with, they condemn them; a regular individual makes a mistake and the world slanders and curses them. It seems as though, if anyone is imperfect in any way, their faults must be brought to the surface, and they are subject to being disrespected for just living. What's ironic is that we are all imperfect, and once there was a Man who lived that was perfect. Because of His perfection, the society in which He lived hated him so much that they beat Him, and crucified Him. It seems as though, 2000 years later, we have forgotten how humanity treated Jesus Christ, because to a lesser extent than crucifixion, we treat people no differently.

In a book titled, "Do not Judge" by Hieromonk Gregorios, he quotes St. John Chrysostom saying, "people ignore the good actions of their neighbors, even when these are many and great, but if the neighbor manifests some fault, however insignificant, it is noticed immediately." When we treat someone horribly, curse their name, make fun of them, degrade them, and humiliate them, we must remember how the Lord spoke: "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to Me."

Why do I write on this topic? As Hieromonk Gregorios points out, "There is no sin worse nor easier than condemning others." And in the Gospels of Triodion, there is a common theme of someone judging their fellow brother. It is incredibly easy to judge and condemn, something that most if not all of us do, and probably frequently, me being first. Christ even tells us on this subject, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." Very harsh and serious words from our Savior...

What is the solution? How do we stop? Well, obviously repentance is the answer. But what does that look like? The Church offers answers: first and foremost, going to Confession. Second, fasting. Repentance and fasting go hand-in-hand. "In fasting one must not only obey the rule against gluttony in regard to food, but refrain from every sin so that, while fasting, the tongue may also fast, refraining from slander, lies, evil talking, degrading one's brother, anger and every sin committed by the tongue" (Abba Dorotheus). And third, actual repentance - the action of asking Christ to forgive one's sins.

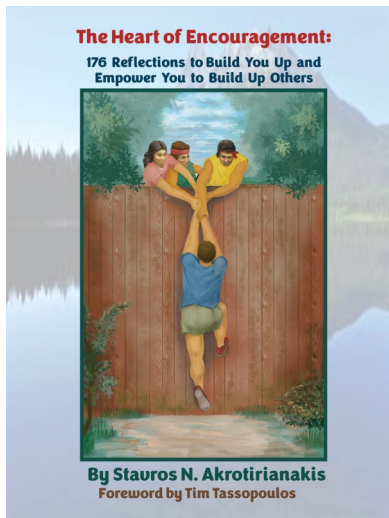
As we begin the period of Triodion shortly, the time of preparation, and especially for when we start the Great Fast, I ask for your forgiveness.

Blessed Fast, and Good Strength!

With love in Christ,
Vasili

The Heart of Encouragement: 176 Reflections to Build You Up and Empower You to Build Up Others

By Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis



One of God's greatest blessings on my life is the ability to write. I love writing. For the most part it comes easy to me. By God's grace, I have written a daily reflection called "The Prayer Team" since February 2015. This has resulted in the publication of seven books, the latest of which is "The Heart of Encouragement." Each month

this year, I'm going to include one reflection from the 176 reflections of this book, as a way to share a small sampling of the contents with you in the hopes that you will buy this book. This is not about pushing a product. It's about sharing a message, a message we all need to hear. We all need more encouragement. Please read this reflection below, and if you like it, please consider purchasing the book for yourself or for someone else. It can be purchased from our bookstore or from Amazon/Barnes and Noble. Everyone wants to make a difference in the world. This book is my attempt to reach this parish and far beyond it with the hope that by God's grace, this book will help change the world even a little bit for the better. +Fr. Stavros

Our Neighbor is Whomever is Closest at this Moment

Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Luke 10:36-37

Most of us are familiar with the parable of the Good Samaritan. As we remember, a lawyer asked Jesus what the two greatest commandments were, to which He replied that we are to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. The man asked Jesus to quantify who our neighbor is. And Jesus told the parable of a Jewish man who was beaten by robbers

and left by the side of the road to die. A priest and a Levite, two Jewish men, who should have been the FIRST ones to run to the man's aid, passed him by without stopping to help. The man who finally stopped was a Samaritan, the sworn enemy of the Jewish robbery victim. The Samaritan spent time (a day and a night) and money (two denarii, or two days' wages) to make sure the man was cared for.

Then Jesus asked the lawyer which man acted like the neighbor to the man who had been beaten and robbed. The man answered, "The one who showed mercy on him" (Luke 10:37). And Jesus told him to go and do the same. The meaning of this parable is that our neighbor is everyone, even our enemy. The Samaritan showed mercy, kindness, and sacrifice for an enemy.

Let's look at this with an even more practical definition of neighbor. Most people, when they hear the word neighbor, think of the person who lives next door to them. By extension, our neighbor is the person who is "residing" closest to us at this moment. At work, our neighbor might be the person whose desk is ten feet away from ours. If we are teachers, our neighbors are the students in a particular class at a particular moment in time. For the doctor, the neighbor is the patient he or she is seeing at a particular moment, for the waiter or waitress, the neighbor is the customer, and for the customer in the restaurant, the neighbor is the person you are eating with as well as the waiter or waitress. Our neighbor can be the driver next to us on the road, the teller at the bank, the clerk at the grocery store, or the fan in the seat next to us at the ballgame. Our neighbor might be someone we know well or someone we don't know at all. Our neighbor might be someone we see every day or someone we will see once and never see again. Our neighbor is everyone, but at any particular moment in time, our neighbor is the person who is physically closest to us.

Encouragement should not just be limited to those we know or those we know well. We aren't only supposed to build up our friends, and we shouldn't only hold people in high esteem who

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are authority figures. Encouragement, building others up, and holding others in high esteem are things we should be giving our neighbor, whoever is next to us at a given moment. If we love our “neighbors” as we love ourselves, then we are constantly putting ourselves in their shoes.

Do we like when people notice us? When they thank us? When they encourage us? Of course, we all like these things. To love our neighbor as ourselves means to do for the neighbor as we hope to have done for ourselves. Loving our neighbor includes encouraging, building up, and holding in high esteem.

How often do we thank the waiter for excellent service or the teller at the bank? How often do we fail to? How often do we hold a door open for someone or even just simply smile? We are so preoccupied on our phones and with ourselves that we often forget to hold our neighbor in any kind of regard. Sadly, our society in some corners has become so unsafe that many times we think twice about even acknowledging our neighbor for fear they will do us harm.

St. Paul reinforces Christ’s command to love our neighbor when he tells us to esteem highly in love those who are among us, whether they are working with us, working for us, or working over us. Since everyone needs encouragement, we should look for opportunities to encourage all of our neighbors, which may mean something as simple as a smile, holding the door open, or even saying, “Good morning.” Thanking someone who has served us in a restaurant or bank is something we should all do. I make a point of thanking all people who wear the uniform of the United States military or police officers. They need encouragement as well. In a world where people are feeling increasingly isolated, lonely, and frustrated, a little encouragement is like a drink from a desert oasis, a refreshing change.

Lord, I know that You gave us a commandment to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Help me to see everyone person who comes into my path today as a neighbor and help me to love each neighbor and to offer encouragement to as many neighbors as possible. Bring someone into my life today who needs encouragement, whether I know this or not, and allow me to be an instrument of encouragement so that they walk away from our encounter feeling

more positive about their day. Amen.

Encouragement Challenge: Look for opportunities to encourage your neighbors today, the people who are occupying the spaces closest to you today!

Inspiration

Listen earnestly to anything your children want to tell you, no matter what. If you don’t listen eagerly to the little stuff when they are little, they won’t tell you the big stuff when they are big, because to them all of it has always been big stuff. ~Catherine Wallace

Bible Emergency Numbers—Quick reference guide

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|------------------------|---------------------|
| Upset | John 14 |
| Weak | Psalm 18: 1-29 |
| Lonely | Psalm 23 |
| Sinned | Psalm 51 |
| Worried | Matthew 6: 22-34 |
| Anxious | Philippians 4: 4-9 |
| Unhappy | Colossians 3: 12-17 |
| In Danger | Psalm 91 |
| Depressed | Psalm 27 |
| Lack of Faith | Exodus 14 |
| Need Courage | Joshua 1 |
| Need Direction | Psalm 73:21-26 |
| Seeking Peace | Matthew 11: 25-30 |
| Leaving on a Trip | Psalm 121 |
| Struggling with Loss | Luke 15 |
| Struggling financially | Psalm 37 |
| Discouraged with work | Psalm 126 |

Your job is not to judge.
Your job is not to figure out if someone deserves something.
Your job is to lift the fallen, to restore the broken and to heal the hurting.

You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need it to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope. ~Thomas Merton

- 8 Truths I Wish I Knew Sooner:
1. Not all friendships are forever.
 2. Envy is a waste of energy.
 3. Parting is not a purpose.
 4. A career is not an identity.
 5. Either embrace change or embrace pain.
 6. Complacency is contagious.
 7. Mistakes are mandatory.
 8. Empathy is clarity.

Liturgical Schedule for February

Thursday, February 2 **Presentation of Christ**

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

Sunday, February 5 **Beginning of the Triodion—Publican and Pharisee**

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, February 6 **St. Photios**

Teaching Divine Liturgy 6:30-8:30 p.m.

(as part of Orthodoxy 101 class)

Friday, February 10 **St. Haralambos**

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

Sunday, February 12 **2nd Sunday of Triodion—The Prodigal Son**

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, February 15 Paraklesis 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, February 18 **1st Saturday of Souls**

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

Memorial Service at the end of the Divine Liturgy

Sunday, February 19 **3rd Sunday of Triodion—The Last Judgment**

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, February 25 **2nd Saturday of Souls**

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

Memorial Service at the end of the Divine Liturgy

Sunday, February 26 **4th Sunday of Triodion—Forgiveness Sunday**

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Forgiveness Vespers 6:00 p.m.

Monday, February 27 **Beginning of Great Lent—Clean Monday**

Canon of St. Andrew 10:00 a.m.

Sacrament of Holy Unction 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday, March 1 9th Hour 5:30 p.m.

Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 6:00 p.m.

Friday, March 3 9th Hour 9:30 a.m.

Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Salutations to the Virgin Mary-1st Stanza 6:30 p.m.

Saturday, March 4 **3rd Saturday of Souls—St. Theodore**

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

Memorial Service at the end of the Divine Liturgy

Sunday, March 5 **1st Sunday of Great Lent—Sunday of Orthodoxy**

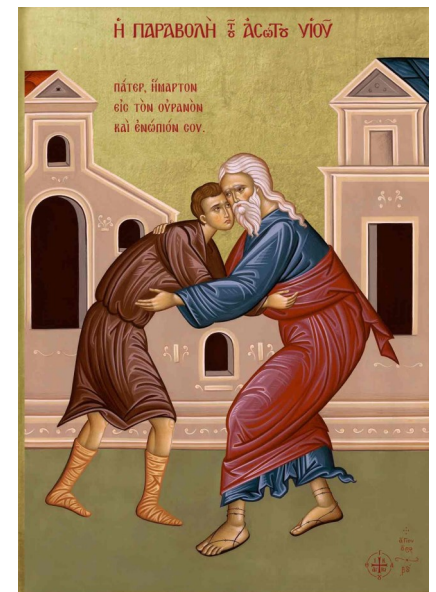
Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.

Procession of Holy Icons at the end of the Divine Liturgy

Presentation of Christ



The Prodigal Son



The Last Judgment



Liturgical Notes for February

Thursday, February 2 - The Presentation of Our Lord into the Temple

The Presentation of Christ is a major feastday of the church and commemorates the day, 40 days after the Nativity, when Christ was brought to the temple when He was 40 days old. According to the Law of Moses, every male child was brought to the temple on its 40th day, together with a sacrifice of pigeons or turtle doves by the parents, and the child was “consecrated Holy to the Lord.” Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the temple on His 40th day, because it was the law to do so. In the temple was a priest named Simeon, who was an older man, who had been promised by God that he would not die until he saw the Christ. When Simeon saw the baby Jesus, he knew in his heart that this was the Lord’s Messiah. He took the child in his arms and prayed “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light to enlighten the Gentiles and for glory to Your people Israel.” (Luke 2:29-32) This prayer is recited over every child in the Orthodox Church when they are brought to church.

Friday, February 10 - St. Haralambos - St. Haralambos was a Saint of the first century and lived in Greece. He was a priest who was martyred. Our parish has a special connection to St. Haralambos since his relics were interred in our altar table when the church was consecrated in 1986.

Wednesday, February 15 – 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 February, the Paraklesis will be offered on Wednesday Morning, February 15, from 10:00-11:00 a.m.

What We Celebrate on the Sundays of Triodion and Lent

Pascha will be celebrated this year on Sunday, April 16. Holy Week will begin with the Saturday of Lazarus on Saturday, April 8. Forty Days prior to that is the start of Great Lent, which is Monday, February 27. And for four Sundays prior to that the Church has the period of the Triodion, or preparation for Great Lent, which will begin on Sunday, February 5.

Sunday, February 5 - Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee - The focus this Sunday is on the Gospel of Luke 18:10-14, in which two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, an externally decent and righteous man of religion, and the other was a publican, a sinful tax-collector who was cheating the people. Though the Pharisee was genuinely righteous under the Law, he boasted before God and was condemned. The publican, although he was truly sinful, begged for mercy, received it, and was justified by God. There is NO fasting this week, in preparation for our great journey.)

Sunday, February 12 - Sunday of the Prodigal Son - On this Sunday in the preparation for Great Lent, Orthodox Christians are to read Christ’s parable about God’s loving forgiveness (Luke 15:11-24). They are to see themselves as being in a foreign country far from the Father’s house and to make the movement of return to God, where we truly belong. The parable gives assurance that the Father will receive them with joy and gladness in their journey through Great Lent, their journey home.

Saturday of the Souls – Saturdays, February 18, February 25 and March 4

It is a Tradition in the Orthodox Church to offer prayers for the souls of all of our loved ones who have departed this life, in the hope of the Resurrection to Eternal Life. There are four Saturdays of the year that are dedicated specifically to this purpose. There are three Saturdays at the beginning of Lent and the Saturday before Pentecost. Everyone is encouraged to submit the names of their loved ones to be commemorated at the services (see enclosed form). Everyone is encouraged to attend one of these services (and bring Kolyva) if you are able, as a way of honoring the people in your family who have passed away, once a year.

Liturgical Notes for February

Sunday, February 19 – Judgment Sunday (Meatfare)

Judgment Sunday is also called - Meatfare Sunday because it is the last Sunday, according to the fasting canons, that the faithful eat meat before Easter. During the following week, we do not fast on Wednesday and Friday (except for meat, of course). On this Sunday, we call to mind something that has not even happened yet: the Second Coming of Christ. Our Lord has promised us that He will come again, “to judge the living and the dead, and His Kingdom will have no end” (from the Nicene Creed). We call to mind the “criteria” of our entrance into Paradise, as our Lord said in today’s Gospel: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.”

Sunday, February 26 - Forgiveness Sunday (Cheesefare)

Cheese-Fare Sunday is the last day in which dairy products are allowed. The Monday after Cheese-Fare Sunday is the official beginning of the Great Lent; this Monday is also called Clean Monday (Kathara Deftera). On Cheese-Fare Sunday the Church commemorates the sending away of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Paradise. Adam and Eve were in complete harmony with God, nature and themselves. They were tempted by the devil and they agreed to eat from the tree of knowledge, in order that they themselves might become gods. The result was fatal; they were cast out of Paradise and sin came into the world. The Holy Fathers selected this event to remind us of our obligations to God and about the laws of fasting and Christian behavior (Matthew 6:14-21).

Sunday, February 26 - Forgiveness Vespers

Great and Holy Lent begins on Monday, March 7, a day called Clean Monday, or “Kathara Deftera” in Greek. Vespers is the service that ends one day and begins another, so we will celebrate the Vespers of Forgiveness and beginning of Great Lent on Sunday evening, March 6, at 6:00 p.m. This service lasts about an hour and marks the beginning of Great Lent, which is announced during one of the hymns mid-way through the service. During this hymn, the priest changes vestments from white to purple, the lights in the church are dimmed and the mood of the service becomes somber. In fact, it is the opposite of the Resurrection Service on Easter, where everything begins dark and goes to light. The service concludes with a prayer of forgiveness being read over the congregation and the exchange of mutual forgiveness among the members of the congregation. This service is an especially appropriate way to begin the Lenten season, and for those who attended last season, is one of the most moving services of the church year.

Monday, February 27 - Canon of St. Andrew

The Penitential Canon of St. Andrew will be read from 10:00-11:00 a.m. on Monday, March 7 as we begin Great Lent. The Canon, in its entirety, takes hours to read. We will read and chant an abridged version of this Canon on Clean Monday. Service books for this service will be available in the narthex.

Monday, February 27 - Holy Unction on Clean Monday

The Sacrament of Holy Unction is always offered during Holy Week on Holy Wednesday. But the sacrament can be done at any time of the year. The emphasis of this sacrament involves, spiritual healing, spiritual cleansing and repentance. What better way to begin Great Lent than the sacrament of Holy Unction. Please bring your Holy Week book to follow along. The service will be held on Monday, February 27, from 6:00-7:30 p.m.

Parish Registry

Baptism-Sophia Evangelia Halkias, daughter of Demetrios and Camille Halkias, was baptized on Sunday, January 15. Vasilios Nenos and Visha Anevich were the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

St. John the Baptist Community News

Celebration of Theophany and our Feastday of St. John

The first week of each year brings the celebration of Theophany and St. John to the calendar. On Friday, January 6, we had 6 young men from our parish dive for the cross at the Tampa Bay area Theophany celebration in Tarpon Springs—John Palios, James Magos, Demetri Passalaris, Alex Findlay, George Xenick and Nicholas Carter.

On the evening of January 6, His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios presided over our Great Vespers for the Feast Day of St. John, assisted by Fr. Stavros, Fr. John Stefero, Fr. John Bociu (Sarastoa), Fr. Theofanis Katsiklis (Tarpon Springs) and Fr. Kyriakos Hambos (Orlando), who returned to our parish for the first time as a priest. A big thank you to Melissa Krinos for offering the Artoklasia and to our Philoptochos Society for sponsoring the reception following Great Vespers.

On Saturday, January 7, His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios officiated at the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, assisted by Fr. Stavros, Fr. John Stefero, Fr. Athanasios Haros (Tarpon Springs), Fr. Jim Paris (Clearwater), Fr. William Damaskos (Clearwater), Fr. Theofanis Katsiklis, and Fr. Kyriakos Hambos. Special thanks again to Melissa Krinos for offer the Artoklasia. Thanks to the choir who sang so beautifully, especially with two days' notice that it would be a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. Thanks to the Parish Council for sponsoring the luncheon and to everyone who helped serve. And a big thank you to everyone who attended and made our feastday truly special!

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 February, the dates are Tuesday, February 7; Monday, February 13; Monday, February 20; and Tuesday, February 28.

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 February, the dates are Tuesdays, February 7, 14, 21 and 28.

GOYA— GOYA doings in January—Our GOYA welcomed GOYAns from St. Claire Shores, MI for a get together on Thursday, January 5. Our regular GOYA meeting was January 8. And from January 20-22, the GOYAns participated in the GOYA Winter Event held in Clearwater.

GOYA doings in February—Lock-in on Saturday, February 4—Our GOYA spring lock-in will be held on Saturday, February 4 beginning at 5:00 p.m. We will be combining with GOYAns from Sarasota for this event.

Parea Dancers—Our Parea Dance Group (GOYAns) will be having a monthly practice one Sunday each month after the Divine Liturgy. Our February practice will be on Sunday, February 12.

Our February GOYA meeting will be Sunday, February 19 from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided. The program this month will include a “siblings retreat” for any GOYAns who have siblings in GOYA. This will be led by Fr. Stavros. For the GOYAns who don't have a sibling in GOYA, Vasili will lead the discussion.

GOYA Lenten Retreat—Our 18th Annual GOYA Lenten Retreat will be held on Friday, February 24-Sunday, February 26 at the Mary Help of Christians Conference Center in East Tampa. This retreat will be for GOYAns from all over the Tampa Bay area. We will welcome our guests to Divine Liturgy at St. John on Sunday, February 26.

Young Adults—Our Young Adult Group will meet for dinner/discussion on Thursday, February 9 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. The group also meets informally for social events. If you are interested in getting notices via What's App, contact Aris Rogers at 813-309-5525.

St. John the Baptist Community News

Men's Group—Our Men's Group will be having a retreat on Saturday, February 18, from 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Cost is \$20 per person and includes lunch. The theme is "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 non-Orthodox friends.

Our meetings for the rest of the spring are Sunday, March 26; Sunday, April 13; and Sunday, May 21.

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.

College Students: Our college student group will be meet on Sunday, February 12 following Divine Liturgy in the office building. Any college student who moved to the Tampa area to study at one of the many local colleges are welcome to join us for lunch and a discussion. Please RSVP to Vasili Panagopoulos so we know how many are coming at vasili@stjohntpa.org.

We are still in need of Adoptees for the Adopt A College Student Program - All you need to do is send some emails and cards to your students, maybe a care package of some snacks or a gift card to buy a coffee or a snack. We want our college students to feel as much extra encouragement as we can give them. Sending notes a few times a semester goes a long way. If you are interested, please contact me at kkaburis2000@yahoo.com or call / text 8132406513. If you don't have time to do this and would like to contribute a few \$5 or \$10 Gift cards from Starbucks, Dunkin, McDonalds, Panera, etc, I can distribute those to students that are not adopted with a card or note of encouragement. (You can drop off to Vasili or put my name on envelope and leave in Church office. Please state that it's for Adopt A College Student Ministry)

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.

Vasilopita Sunday—We had our annual Vasilopita Sunday on January 8. We recognized all of our ministries and raised money for St. Basil's Academy. There were two of coins from our two vasilopites. They were Presbytera Denise Stefero representing the bookstore and Olivia Skourellos representing Connecting with Christ Ministry. Thank you to Melissa Krinos for baking our two HUGE vasilopites, to Jeanie Nenos who organized the event and to those who brought vasilopites to share with the community at coffee hour. We raised over \$1,925 for St. Basil's Academy in New York.

GO RED SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12 - February is healthy heart month. We celebrate Valentine's Day. We get our hearts ready for Great Lent. And we recognize the need to live healthier lives. As a show of support for our hearts and an opportunity to do something together, everyone is asked to wear RED on Sunday, February 12, for Valentine's Day and for healthy hearts. We did this last year and it was great. See you in red on February 12.

Two Orthodoxy 101 Classes are left in February. If you haven't attended any of Orthodoxy 101 so far, you are certainly welcome to attend these.

Monday, February 6 The Divine Liturgy—This will actually be a "teaching" Liturgy on the solea of the church. If you have taken the class, or if you wish to only attend THIS session, please feel free to do so.

Monday, February 13 Orthodox Traditions—fasting, icons, prayer, and separating Theology from "yiyalogy." Classes will be held on these Mondays from 6:30-8:30 p.m. and will be held in the CHURCH Sanctuary.

Philoptochos - Membership Drive - We Invite all women ages 18 to ??? To join the St. John the Baptist Philoptochos Annunciation Chapter! Philoptochos means friend of the poor, and our group helps all those in need. We have provided disaster relief, shelter for those in need, assistance in times of crisis, support for missions, and so much more. Suggested Membership is \$35.00, and all ladies over 80 are free. However, we accept whatever you have in your heart to give. Your donation makes you a member of the National (\$15), The Atlanta Metropolis (\$10) and our Local Chapter of Philoptochos...

Also thank you so much to all those who have helped us with our drives for our Veterans and battered women's shelter, St. John Vespers and Vasilopita Sunday for St Basil!

GETTING BACK TO THE BASICS OF CHRISTIANITY:

*How can I be a spiritual leader if i'm not even a
follower?*

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18
10:00 A.M. - 4:00 P.M.**

ALL MEN ARE WELCOME, ORTHODOX OR NOT

\$15 (COVERS LUNCH)

**STARTING WITH DIVINE LITURGY, FOLLOWED BY
PRESENTATIONS AND GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

**FR. STAVROS
AKROTIRIANAKIS**



**ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK
ORTHODOX CHURCH**

2418 W. Swann Ave. Tampa, FL 33609

Kindly RSVP by February 15 to frstav@gmail.com

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.

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 StJohnGOCTampa.

Live Streaming

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

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



Like





>>>> HEALTHY MINDS

A SHORT QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION ON MENTAL HEALTH

WHY

To destigmatize mental health care through awareness of what it is and what it isn't.

WHEN

Sunday, February 19, after the Divine Liturgy

WHERE

in the Zaharias Room

WHO IS FACILITAT- ING THIS

Amy Wenditz, LMHC
Mary Ann Konstas, LMHC
Bill Zaferos, who will offer testimonial on the benefits of mental health care

TOPICS TO BE COVERED

What is the counseling experience like?
How do you find the right counselor for you?
How do you know when it is time to seek counseling?
How might I benefit from counseling even if I don't think I have mental illness?

What else?: There is no cost or obligation for this session, just an opportunity to hear information and ask questions.

Youth Protection Program Reminder:



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

At this time, the Youth Protection Program is currently under revision and changes from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

Please be on the lookout in weekly bulletins and future Messengers with the updated Youth Protection Program.



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



Nursing Ministry Article - February

Did you know...

- Someone needs a blood transfusion every two seconds
- One in three people will need a transfusion at some point in their life
- One blood donation can save up to three lives

Your Nursing Ministry will host a blood drive on Sunday February 19th. To donate, you must be at least 16 years old, weigh 110+ pounds, and be in generally good health. Donating blood is one way you can be a hero and help save lives. Please consider donating.

REACH OUT TO YOUR NURSING MINISTRY FOR ANY QUESTIONS



"Souper Bowl of Caring"

Which team will raise the most donations for the children of

Hope Children's Home

Sunday, Feb 12th is not only the BIG game where we cheer for our favorite football team, but also "SOUPER BOWL OF CARING" Sunday a nationwide, youth-led initiative to TACKLE hunger! Pick your favorite team and join our HOPE & JOY Youth ministry collect donations to benefit Hope Children's Home- a Christian home that takes orphaned children and is entirely supported by churches, private individuals, clubs, and organizations.

Our Sunday School children will be near the side doors on Sunday, Feb 12th holding pots to collect your cash donation or food item. Pick your favorite team's pot to donate to! The BIG winner: Hope Children's Home.

Urgent Needs This Year are Olive Oil, Pancake Syrup, Parmesan Cheese, Ranch and Caesar Salad Dressing, Chicken Bouillon, and Broth. Please find complete list of urgent needs at: <https://hopechildrenshome.org/floridanneeds/>

St. John Stewardship Report 2021-2023

Year to Year Comparison ~	2023*	2022*	2021*
Pledged Year to Date	\$279,639	\$463,618	\$479,653
Received Year to Date	\$68,762	\$76,561	\$109,444
Average Pledge	\$1,928	\$1,422	\$1,354
Median Pledge	\$1,300	\$863	\$704
# of Individual/Families Pledged/Giving	165	326	362

Twelve Disciples Project

St. John the Baptist's *Twelve Disciples Project* is continuing, vibrant and vigorous during the new year, as dozens of your fellow Orthodox Christian Prayer Warriors, set aside a few minutes each day to pray for "mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, protection and pardon and remission of the sins for servants of God" all members of the St. John's congregation.

Each year on February 2nd the Church commemorates the 'Υπαπαντή τοῦ Κυρίου, or "presentation" of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is when he was brought to Jerusalem 40 days after his birth so that His Mother and Joseph might present Him in the temple according to the Law of Moses (Exodus 13:2).

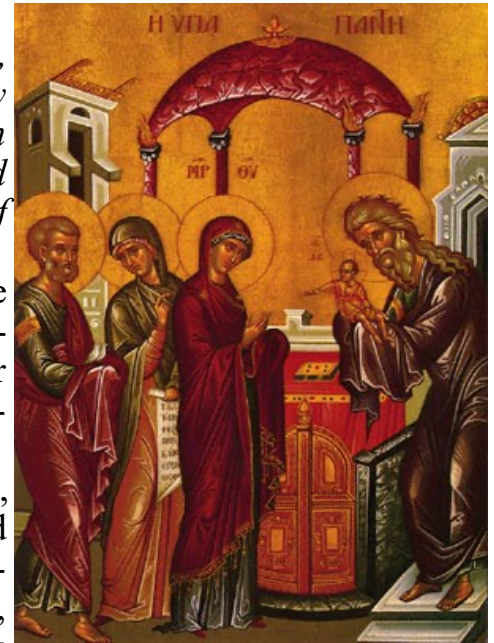
We remember a just and devout man, the greatly aged Simeon, who was guided by the Holy Spirit. For a long time, Simeon had been awaiting the salvation of God, and he had been informed by divine revelation that he would not die until he beheld the Savior. Thus, when Jesus first entered the Temple, Simeon took Him up into his aged arms, and giving glory to God, sang: "Now lettest Thou, Thy servant, depart in peace, O Master" confessing that he would now close his eyes joyfully, since he had seen the Light of revelation for the nations and the Glory of Israel (Luke 2:25-32). From ancient times, the Holy Church has retained this tradition of the "churching" of the mother and new-born child on the fortieth day and of the reading of prayers of purification.

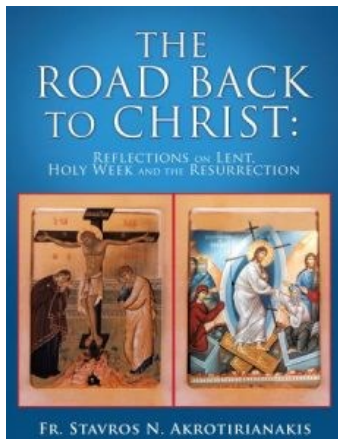
"Hail Virgin Theotokos full of Grace, for Christ our God, the Sun of Righteousness, has dawned from you, granting light to those in darkness. And you, O Righteous Elder, rejoice, taking in your arms, the Deliverance of our souls, who grants us Resurrection." Apolytikion: Presentation of Our Lord

Two years ago, during the COVID-19 crisis and "lock-down", Fr. Stavros conducted weekly Paraklesis services when he prayed for, and today continues to pray for, each individual within our community to be protected beneath angel wings. He also prays for this protection during each Liturgical Service held at St. John. Beginning a few months later, Fr. engaged the assistance of the St. John the Baptist *Prayer Warriors* to assist his effort with the *Twelve Disciples Project*.

Are you interested? Participating requires no special talent, no physical ability, no financial investment but only a desire to offer up prayerful love for your fellow members of the St. John the Baptist congregation. There are no restrictions. You may choose a time to pray when you can spend a quiet moment with God each day.

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





The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection is now on sale!

It is a series of daily reflections to be read from the beginning of Triodion (this year that is February 5) through All Saints Day (this year that is June 11). Pick up your copy today so you can begin reading it on February 5. This book costs \$18.99 and all monies taken in at the bookstore go to the church. Use book graphic from last year

The Prayer Team will celebrate its 8th Anniversary on February 20!

For eight years, Fr. Stavros has been writing a daily reflection. It comes out every morning at 12:30 a.m. via Constant Contact. From Monday-Friday, Father will be writing on the subject of "The Liturgy of St. Basil" and on Saturday - Sunday, Father is writing on the Scriptures of each Sunday.

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

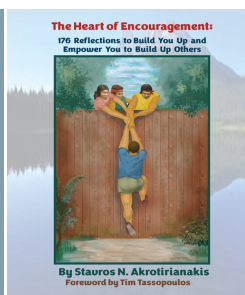
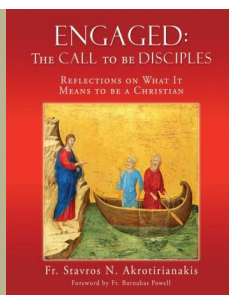
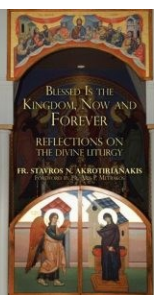
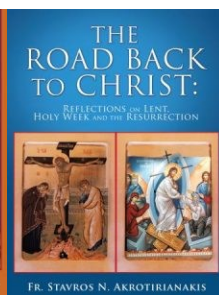
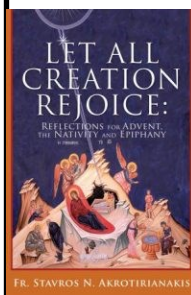
Over 3,791 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 6 years! Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email 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 Vasili 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



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 has an entire section of titles geared toward the many issues young married couples face. Check out the following books along with many others in our bookstore this month.

Under the Laurel Tree – Grieving Infertility with Saints Joachim and Anna

Children of My Heart – Finding Christ Through Adoption

Fertile Ground – A Pilgrimage through Pregnancy

Of Such is the Kingdom – A Practical Theology of Disability

Parenting Toward the Kingdom – Orthodox Christian Principles of Child Rearing

Preserve Them O Lord – A Guide for developing marital unity for Orthodox Couples

Attention Sunday School Parents PreK – 6th!

"EMPOWERING PARENTS" RETREAT: MAKING SUNDAY SCHOOL PART OF YOUR EVERYDAY

WHAT: A retreat for parents PreK–6th grade

WHEN: Sunday, February 26

TIME: Immediately following church until **1:30 pm**

WHERE: The Zaharias Room

We will discuss:

- How to bring each week's lesson into every day of the week
- Why we bring our children to Sunday School and why it's important
- How our Sunday School program can better meet the needs of students and parents
- Any topic parents want to discuss – we want your input!



**JOIN
US!**

For Children!

Lunch, a movie and childcare will be provided (on premises) for children with parents participating in the Sunday School Parents Retreat!

PLEASE TELL YOUR CHILD'S SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER IF YOU WILL ATTEND

Sunday School News

It was wonderful to start off 2023 with so many of our students attending Sunday School. Everyone seemed so happy to be back. Our topics for January were the Epiphany/ St. John the Baptist, the Vasilopita/St. Basil, Confession, Salvation (The story of Zacchaeus) and the Presentation of Christ.

Congratulations to the young men from St. John's who dove for the cross at the Epiphany Service in Tarpon Springs on January 6th. They are John Palios, Nicholas Carter, Demetri Passalaris, George Xenick, Alex Findlay, and James Magos. They represented our church and our faith in a beautiful way!

On Sunday, January 8th, the Sunday School had their own Vasilopita Celebration. Each student received a piece of this sweet cake and 2 lucky students found a coin inside. Congratulations to Penelope Waksman, one of our Toddler Two students, and Maria Palios, who is in high school. May these two young ladies have many blessings this year. We would truly like to thank Melissa Krinos for making this Vasilopita for our Sunday School year after year. It was delicious and appreciated by all of us.

On Saturday, January 14th, the Sunday School Teachers participated in a retreat with Fr. Stavros. The Sunday School teachers are truly blessed to have Fr. Stavros as our spiritual leader of our Sunday School. THANK YOU Fr. Stavros for dedicating so much of your busy schedule to our Sunday School.

One of the best ways to prepare for Pascha is to participate in the Sacrament of Confession. Each Sunday School class had, or will have, the opportunity to participate in this important Sacrament. On January 22nd, our 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Graders participated in the Sacrament of Confession. Our 4th, 5th and 6th Graders will go to Confession on February 19th. Our 7th - 12th graders will go during their GOYAN Lenten Retreat, the weekend of Feb. 25th. We would like to thank Father Stavros for hearing the Confessions of these young children. It is a wonderful thing to see our students going to Confession year after year.

On Sunday, February 26th we will have our PRE-LENTEN RETREAT during Sunday School. Afterwards there will be a PARENT WORKSHOP from 12:00-2:00 in the church. While this workshop is going on we will entertain your children with a movie. Of course lunch will be provided.



February Calendar:

- Sunday, February 5th: Topic: Publican & Pharisee
- YOUTH SUNDAY
- 7th - 12th Graders will stay in Church.
- Sunday, February 12th: Topic: The Prodigal Son
- Sunday, February 19th: Topic: The Last Judgement
- CONFESSION FOR 4th - 6th Graders
- Sunday, February 26th: Topic: Forgiveness Sunday
- 7th - 12th Graders will stay in Church. PRE-LENTEN RETREAT
- 12:00 - 2:00 PARENT WORKSHOP while children watch a movie.

Thank You to all of Our Friends!

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

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

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

Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

Friend of St. John the Baptist:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ **Email:** _____

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

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

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

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.

Vasilopita Coin

On Saturday, January 7, St. John's Day, Christine Scourtes, a member of YAH and the oldest member of St. John's community found the coin in her piece of the Vasilopita.

Birthdays: None

Planned Activities

On January 21st we had a potluck luncheon at the Kourmolis Hall. After lunch we cut and enjoyed the Vasilopita. Then we played bingo and ten members won prizes.

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



Diane Trimis and Christine Scourtes

Daughters of Penelope (DOP) Alcmaeon #167 Tampa

About 60 folks attended the 16 December AHEPA Family Christmas Social! The delicious meal and fun activities were free of charge. Participants generously donated \$1400 to go directly to the AHEPA Family Scholarships for some deserving young people in our community.

To add to the festivities of this beautiful event, a choral group from Hillsborough Community College sang Christmas carols throughout the evening and the children used the provided art supplies to make ornaments and gingerbread houses.

Thank you to all who supported, attended, and generously donated to make this event a great success! Pictures from the event are shown below:



AHEPA Family Christmas Social Ornament and Gingerbread house making – Dec 16, 2022



SCHOOL OF GREEK LANGUAGE AND CULTURE CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

On Saturday, December 17th 2022 students, parents and teachers of the newly established School of Greek Language and Culture had their Christmas show at the Gym of Saint John's Greek Orthodox Church in Tampa.

The students recited poems, they sang songs about Christmas in Greek language, and they got the applause of their parents who were very proud of them!

Santa Clauss (Agios Vasilis) gave presents to all students and everybody enjoyed the buffet at the end of the show.

Mr. Loukas Tsokos, the consul of the Greek Consulate of Tampa, talked about the importance of the Greek School and its contribution to maintaining and spreading the Greek language and culture.

Mr. Michalis Halikoutakis, the sponsor of the school, congratulated the students for their effort and wished all Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Mr. Yannis Giavaras, the director of the school, congratulated all students and he thanked the teachers for their work with our students. He, also, thanked Father Stavros for his permission to use the Gym for the event, Mr. Vasilis Panagopoulos who set the sound system and Mr. Zelatis for his help.

All parents who are interested in registration of their children to the School of Greek Language and Culture can communicate with Mr. Giavaras (Tel. 718 419 4413, email: igiavaras@gmail.com).

The lessons take place every Saturday between 12:30pm-2:30pm at Bridgeprep Charter School behind Saint John's Church. The school is tuition free for the first year thanks to the generosity of our great sponsor Mr. Michalis Halikoytakis.

Καλή Χρονιά! - Happy New Year!

Altar Angels

I wish everyone a very Happy and Healthy New Year 2023 with Peace, Love, Hope and Joy!

I would like to personally "Thank" all the ladies who volunteer and devote time to cleaning and beautifying our Church on a weekly basis. Their time and talents are greatly appreciated.

Special thanks to the Altar Angels:

Vickie Peckham, Ourania Stephanides, Tina Andre, Donna and Toulia Trakas, Jackie Voulgaris, Skip Higdon, Georgia Diamantakes and Kathy Kaburis. We are a great team! God Bless You All!

I would also like to "Thank" everyone who came to help decorate the Church for the Christmas season. It looked very beautiful. Thank you to Vickie Peckham, Debbie Nicklow, Felix Ramirez, and George Chagaris.

With Love, Kalliope Chagaris

PLEASE COMMEMORATE THE NAMES OF MY DEPARTED FAMILY

MEMBERS IN THE SATURDAY OF THE SOULS MEMORIAL SERVICES - February 18, February 25, and March 4

In Memory of

****You only need to write the first name of each person. Please mail to the church office by Friday, February 17.**

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

FIFTY-TWO VERSES - I N - 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.

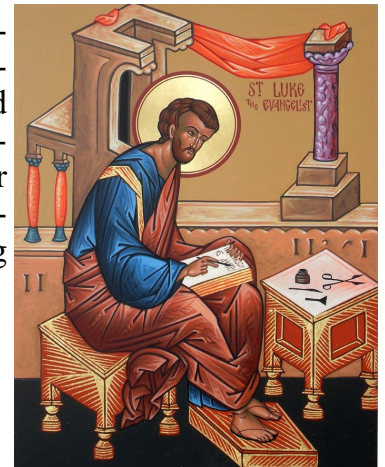
Another challenge to consider is to keep a journal, read it, memorize it and contemplate the verse each week. Allow the Holy Spirit to move your mind and your thoughts and then write down those thoughts and keep them in a journal. If you do one reflection on Scripture each week, you will have the best 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 February. 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.

February 5-11

***For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,
but he who humbles himself will be exalted.
Luke 18:14***

The verses this month will focus on one or two verses from the Gospel readings on the four Sundays of Triodion. The lesson of the first Sunday is the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee. The lesson here is about humility. Christianity is not about self-aggrandizement, but about humility. If we are God's children, and we recognize Christ as our Savior, that means we have a consciousness that we need saving, we can't save ourselves. And that's where humility starts. It starts with saying "I'm not the center of the universe, I am not god, I serve a God who is greater than me, and a purpose that is greater than myself." That was the mistake of the Pharisee. He had done a lot of good things—like praying, fasting, tithing. But he put himself at the center of things, rather than putting God there. He had made himself his own god by declaring that he was essentially perfect. The publican, on the other hand, did a lot of things wrong. And there is no denying that. He, however, came before God asking for mercy, recognizing he needed it. He could not save himself by himself. He needed God for that. That is why God exalted him while humbling the Pharisee.



February 12-18

But when he came to himself, he said, “How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger.”
Luke 15:17

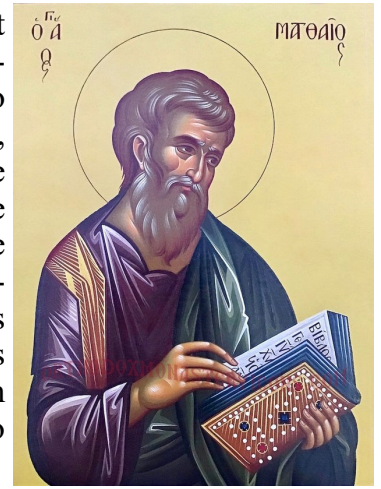
Most people hopefully recognize that this verse is from the Parable of the Prodigal Son. It is perhaps the most important line in the story. The most important line was not the transgression of the son or even the forgiveness of the father, but the awareness of the Prodigal Son that he had done wrong, that he needed forgiveness, and that the father had capacity to put him in a better place than he was in. Recall that at the moment this happened, he was sitting on a farm feeding swine and eating what they were eating and no one gave him anything. He “came to himself.” His father didn’t send a search party. The son came to himself, he realized that he had done wrong, he realized that he needed to do better, he realized that if he threw himself at his father’s mercy, that his father would at least give him food to eat. This moment of awareness led to repentance which led the son to make the journey back to the father, who forgave and restored him. The lesson is that in some ways, we are all Prodigal sons and daughters, and this is the time for some awareness that we have estranged ourselves in some way from God and need to make the journey back to him. This is called repentance, it is the entire point of the Lenten journey, and unlike the son, we know that our Father will forgive us and accept us when we go back to Him.

February 19-25

And the King will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”
Matthew 25:40

We serve God by serving others. That is the message of this verse, which is part of the Gospel reading on the Sunday of the Last Judgment. When we serve others, it is as if we are serving the Lord Himself. When we fail to serve others, it is as if we are failing to serve the Lord Himself. Ideally, (and it is a lofty ideal) we see the Lord in other people. We superimpose His icon over their faces and treat others as if we were treating Him directly. If Jesus walked into the room, looking like the icon on the icon screen of our churches, we certainly would stop what we were doing and serve Him. When the

wrong person comes in at the wrong time, we often-times fail to run to serve. If it was the Lord, it would never be the wrong person or the wrong time. This is the kind of attitude, again ideally, that we take towards each person. Christ says our judgment is based on how consistently we do this!



February 26-March 4

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.
Matthew 6:14

We don’t use the word “karma” in the Orthodox Church. We don’t believe in it. This verse is as close to “what goes around comes around” as we can get. Christ teaches us clearly in the Gospel of Matthew 6:14, that if we forgive others, God will forgive us. If we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us either. This is why immediately prior to this verse, we find the words of the Lord’s Prayer, where Jesus prays that our trespasses should be forgiven to the degree we forgive others, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” There is an understanding that God’s forgiveness of our sins directly correlates to us forgiving one another. It is important, crucial actually, that we learn how to forgive and to ask forgiveness as well.



In “Honor” or Our Recent Cold Weather (Anonymous)

Dear Floridians,

We are going to be ok!

I have put together some quick tips for those who aren't sure how they are supposed to navigate this weekend's unholy cold weather.

- Wear real shoes. Your flip flops will have to fend for themselves for a few days. They will be okay.
- Socks! Wear them. Preferably with real shoes. Still a no on the flip flops.
- Put the doors back on your Jeeps, FFS.
- Consider pants. The extra fabric may feel a tad foreign at first, but you gotta power through.
- Stock your fridge now. Publix will be closed. Assume a record number of employees will call in dead. They've never been this cold before, and will believe they have passed.
- You've likely never noticed it but there is a setting on your AC unit at home that makes it blow out warm air. Use it. Look for a little fire symbol or the word H E A T ● There is also a similar function for the ac in your car... and turn off the seat AC feature.
- Umbrella. Use an umbrella if you do venture outside. Not for rain, it will help you avoid head injuries caused by frozen iguanas falling from trees. Those suckers are heavy.
- Bring all those orchids inside immediately. A couple hours in that kind of cold will kill them dead in an hour just like it will you if you don't stay inside your house.
- That soft warm chewing gum thats always in your car will now be harder than rock. Please don't break a tooth.
- DON'T use your Evian face spritz outside. It will freeze to your face and you'll have little ice cicles hanging from your new lashes.
- Wash your hair now. You're not going to this weekend. Perhaps pick up some dry shampoo on your way to pick up the last Publix sub of the week.
- Take deep breaths, you got this. No deep breaths on Saturday though. You're lungs aren't used to air that cold. They will collapse... best hold your breath until Monday

Florida, may the odds be ever in your favor.



Our word for our for 2023 is “Serve”. Here are the words that our parishioners chose to mark their year.

Verse of the Year - Joshua 24:15

“But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

We Will Serve the Lord

A Consciousness of Service By Fr. Stavros

Our word for our parish for 2023 is “serve.” 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 2023.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Joshua 24:15



In *The Messenger* this year, I'll be writing brief articles about our word of the year, talking about the various ways that we can apply the idea of “serve” into our daily lives. Before we can serve though, we have to develop a consciousness of what it means to serve and a desire to serve. It's like when we make a decision to do something, like start an exercise program or take a college class, we can't do that thing until we see a value in the thing we are going to do. Before we can embark on serving, we have to understand what exactly it means to serve. Years ago, there used to be distinctions at gas stations, which said “self-serve” on this pump and “full-serve” on another one. In this case, full serve meant someone serves you. And self-serve meant you serve yourself. There was no option for “serve others.” Full serve is what kings and queens expect. It means we sit still, while others serve us. Status, entitlement, and self-importance are the words that come to mind if one has a full-service mentality, if one thinks he or she is entitled to a full-service lifestyle. Self-serve gas is definitely the most humble choice between full serve and self-serve, but in real life, self-serve is narcissism. It means “I serve as it pleases me.” To serve means to offer something of oneself to someone else. Therefore, there can be no such thing as “self-serve” because there is

no one else in the equation. To serve means to find something that I have, that someone else needs, and to offer that. The phrase “that someone else needs” is also critically important. Because many times, people want to offer something that really isn't needed and this leads more to narcissism than service. For instance, let's say that you need someone to help you paint your house. And I come over and say “I want to serve, I can mow your lawn.” And you say, “well, what I really need is help painting the house.” And I say “well, I only mow lawns.” The reality is that “I'm not here to serve, I'm here to mow the lawn.” Because if I am here to serve, I'll do whatever it is that you need, not whatever I want or what I'm good at. So to serve means to offer something that we have, that someone else needs, and to offer it to that person. Maybe what someone needs is something I can do but it is difficult. That's really what serving is, to take from ourselves, even something we treasure and to offer it to someone else, to do the thing that is difficult but needed and do it anyway. In ensuing months, we will be talking about specific ways that we serve and that we can serve, but before we do, it is important to establish what serving really is.



Community life at St. John!

Christmas Eve Annual “Fireside with Father” 2022



Community life at St. John!

**St. John's GOYA with GOYA from St. Claire
Shores in Michigan who visited Florida for
Epiphany on January 5**



**Fr. Stavros with our Epiphany Divers in
Tarpon Springs - January 6**



**Selfie with the Archbishop!
-January 6**

Hierarchical Visit from His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta for the Feast Day of St. John the Baptist and Vasilopita Sunday



Welcome back Fr. Kyriakos!



Congratulations to Olivia Skourellos and Presvytera Denise who both got the St. Basil coin.

May they have all the blessings and intercessions from St. Basil in this coming year!



◀ Jan 2023		February 2023					Mar 2023 ▶
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	
			1 No Choir Practice	2 Presentation of Christ Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Adult Greek School	3	4 GOYA Lock-in @ 5 p.m.	
5 Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	6 Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m. Teaching Liturgy	7 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Philoptochos Board Meeting (Zoom)	8 Choir Practice	9 Adult Greek School Young Adult Discussion 6:30 p.m.	10 St. Haralambos Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	11 Young at Heart	
12 Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Parea Dance Practice Souper Bowl of Caring Luncheon-Philoptochos College Discussion	13 Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	14 Valentine's Day Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	15 Paraklesis 10:00 a.m. No choir practice	16 Adult Greek School	17	18 First Saturday of the Souls Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Community Outreach MEN'S RETREAT 10-4	
19 Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Youth Sunday Mental health presentation AHEPA/Daughters GOYA 5:00 p.m.	20 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	21 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	22 Choir Practice	23 Adult Greek School	24 GOYA Lenten Retreat-TAMPA	25 Second Saturday of the Souls Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. GOYA Lenten Retreat	
26 Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Philoptochos General meeting Sunday school pre-Lent Retreat Forgiveness Vespers 6:00 p.m.	27 Clean Monday Canon of St. Andrew 10:00 a.m. Holy Unction 6:00 p.m.	28 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.					

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

2418 W. Swann Avenue

Tampa, FL 33609-4712

Office: (813) 876-8830 Fax: (813) 443-4899

office@stjohntpa.org

www.stjohntpa.org

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St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Timetable of Services

Saturdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sundays: Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Weekdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.

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

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

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

Pastoral Assistant
Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134 (Cell)
vasili@stjohntpa.org

Parish Council
John Zelatis, President 813-727-2271
Euripides Panos, Vice President 813-352-3972
Marilyn Sandborn, Secretary 813-855-8678
Gary Ward, Treasurer 813-846-3898
Jim Armstrong 954-295-6665
Amin Hanhan 813-846-2957
Nick Katzaras 863-581-2430
Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855
Alexis Scarfogliero 813-892-1599
Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026
Mike Xenick 813-340-8737

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

Adopt a College Student
Kathy Kaburis 813-240-6513

Adult Greek School
Magda Myer 813-523-5771

AHEPA
Thomas Sakaris, President 201-819-2319

Altar Angels
Kalliope Chagaris 813-789-4134

Altar Boys
Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Bookstore
Presbyteria Denise Stefero 678-464-4833

Bible Study-Monday Night
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
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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
VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

Welcoming Ministry
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Young Adult
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Young at Heart
Bill Manikas 813-716-8185
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“May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father and the Communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” From the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.