

# THE —MESSENGER—



**St. John the Baptist  
Greek Orthodox  
Church**

**Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis (Proistamenos)  
Fr. Stratton Dorozenski  
(Retired Priest In Residence)  
Fr. John Stefero (Retired Priest In Residence)**



**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

# St. John's Directory

## 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.

<b>Parish Priest</b> Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-876-8830 (Office) frstav@gmail.com		<b>Buildings &amp; Grounds</b> Euripides Panos 813-352-3972		<b>MOMS</b> Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862	
<b>Retired Priest in Residence</b> Rev. Fr. Stratton Dorozenski 813-876-8830 (Office)		<b>Chanter</b> Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134		<b>Men's Fellowship</b> Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038	
<b>Retired Priest in Residence</b> Rev. Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830 (Office) jwstefero50@hotmail.com		<b>Choir</b> Tara Swartzbaugh, Director Ruth Losovitz, Organist 813-313-0439 727-688-2782		<b>Parish Nursing Ministry</b> Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026	
<b>Pastoral Assistant</b> Vasili Panagopoulos vasili@stjohntpa.org		<b>College Student Program</b> Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134		<b>Oratorical Festival</b> Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374	
<b>Parish Council</b> John Zelatis, President Euripides Panos, Vice President Marilyn Sandborn, Secretary Gary Ward, Treasurer Jim Armstrong Amin Hanhan Nick Kazaras Suzanne Pileggi Alexis Scarfogliero Marcelle Triantafilou Mike Xenick		<b>Community Outreach</b> Greg Melton 813-967-2074		<b>Photography Ministry</b> Karina Findlay 813-476-9632	
		<b>Connect Through Christ - Special Needs Ministry for Children</b> Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534		<b>Philoptochos</b> Melissa Krinos 813-716-9975	
		<b>Dance Groups</b> H XAPA MAΣ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668 Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347 Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963 ΠΑΡΕΑ, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136 ΠΑΝΗΓΥΡΙ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668		<b>Stewardship</b> Chris Kyrus George Mitseas 757-672-1920 813-748-1220	
		<b>Daughters of Penelope</b> Elena Paras Ketchum 813-229-0144		<b>Sunday School</b> Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102	
<b>Office Staff</b> Kim Rojas, Administrative Assistant kim@stjohntpa.org Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper debbie@stjohntpa.org		<b>Festival</b> Mike Xenick 813-340-8737		<b>Usher</b> Pete Trakas 813-505-2193	
<b>Adopt a College Student</b> Kathy Kaburis 813-240-6513		<b>Finance Committee</b> Gary Ward 813-846-3898		<b>Veterans/1<sup>st</sup> Responders</b> Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830	
<b>Adult Greek School</b> Magda Myer 813-523-5771		<b>GriefShare</b> Donna Hambos 813-843-8412		<b>Website / Social Media / APP VOLUNTEER NEEDED!</b>	
<b>AHEPA</b> Thomas Sakaris, President 201-819-2319		<b>Gasparilla Parking</b> Alex limberatos 262-370-0586		<b>Welcoming Ministry</b> Maria Xenick 813-765-3587	
<b>Altar Angels</b> Kalliope Chagaris 813-789-4134		<b>GOYA</b> Michael & Bessie Palios 813-523-0346		<b>Women's Bible Study</b> Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038	
<b>Altar Boys</b> Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038		<b>Hope/Joy</b> George & Zackie Ameres 813-245-3813		<b>Young Adult</b> Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038	
<b>Bookstore</b> Presbyteria Denise Stefero 678-464-4833		<b>Joy Tweens</b> Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963		<b>Young at Heart</b> Bill Manikas Dora Morgan 813-716-8185 813-613-3738	
<b>Bible Study-Monday Night</b> Fr. John Stefero 678-637-4425		<b>Junior Olympics</b> Dwight Forde 561-310-5034		<b>Youth Protection</b> Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855	
				<b>12 Disciples</b> Mathew Balasis 727-421-7376	



# Fr. Stavros' Message

**Christ is Risen! Christos Anesti!**



Our Holy Week journey was a week of spiritual renewal and spiritual excitement. We had great attendance. Palm Sunday morning was probably our best attended Palm Sunday ever. The church was packed and so was the hall. There was a circle of children around the entire hall before the clergy even got into the hall during the procession.

As I watched all of this, I couldn't help but think what our community life would be like if we had this many people in church EVERY Sunday. Not only what worship would be like but Sunday school, GOYA, all the other adult ministries, stewardship, charity.

A big thank you to John Zelatis, who spent the entire day Holy Saturday cooking what turned out to be a fantastic Paschal meal. A big thank you to the Parish Council who helped serve.

There are so many people to thank for our recent Holy-Week journey:

~Fr. Stratton Dorozenski and Fr. John Stefero, who served with me at the Divine Services of Holy Week, and not only made the services more beautiful and the distribution of Holy Communion and Holy Unction more efficient, they really added a depth and beauty, and fullness to the services.

~Vasili Panagopoulos, our Pastoral Assistant and head chanter, for singing so beautifully during the week. Thank you also to Vasili for organizing the vigil on Holy Thursday night and into Good Friday.

~ ~The choir, led by Tara Swartzbaugh, in her first year as our director, who sang six of the seven nights of Holy Week;

~Zackie Ameres and everyone who helped out with the HOPE/JOY Good Friday retreat;

~The GOYAns who helped out preparing things on Good Friday and who also sponsored our Good Friday evening reception.

~Pete Trakas and the ushers who made sure everything ran smoothly;

~Karina Findlay and the Photography ministry who documented all of our services. Pictures can be viewed at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/stjohnsgoetampa/>

~The army of altar boys who faithfully served;

~The Bridegroom maidens who kept watch Palm Sunday, Holy Monday and Holy Tuesday evenings;

~The Myrrh-bearers who stood at the tomb of Christ on Good Friday;

~Vickie Peckham, who organized both the Maidens and the Myrrh-bearers;

~The light-bearers—Maria Palios, Toula Trakas and Kaitlin Zelatis—who received and distributed the Light of Christ at the Resurrection Service;

~The Parish Council members and others who helped out with reading during the week;

~Those who read the Gospel in various languages at the Agape vespers;

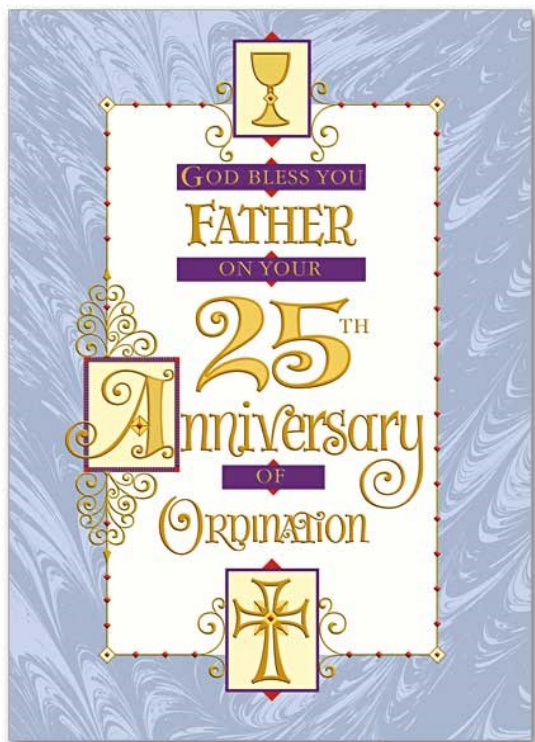
~Kalliope Chagaris who led our altar angels, and all who helped her decorate the church during the Lent and Holy Week services;

~The Philoptochos Society which put on the Palm Sunday luncheon;

~And most importantly, those who attended the services throughout the week and filled the church with life, with prayer, and with joy.



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### 25 Years of Priesthood

I was ordained to the Holy Priesthood of the Orthodox Church on May 15, 1998. On May 15, I will mark 25 years ordained as a priest. This milestone is significant in anything we do—being married, in a career, in a certain job. 25 years, one quarter century, that's a long time to do something. Life looked a lot different back in 1998—very few people had cell phones so ministry looked a lot different. We hadn't had 9/11 yet. Things cost a lot less than they do now. As for me, I was very naïve, about a lot of things, had a full head of hair, weighed less, didn't wear glasses, and really didn't know what I was getting myself into. Of the things that have happened over the last 25 years, many of them I never dreamed of when I was ordained. I never had a thought about directing a summer camp, or writing a book. I never thought I would live nearly 19 of those 25 years (and counting) in Florida or serve one parish for that long.

Interestingly, though, the night before I was ordained, I wrote on a notepad some things I thought would be part of the "ideal" parish. On my notepad, it reads that the ideal parish would have 400+ families, a solid youth group, multiple clergy, a good choir, enamel furnishings in the altar (my preference) and that I would hear lots of confessions. That entry on the notepad sounds a lot like our parish today.

What I didn't know when I got ordained is that this ministry would be so difficult yet so satisfying, so humbling and so joyful, one of my greatest joys and one of my greatest sorrows,

that I would make friends who would become like family and that I would also be betrayed by people I trusted, that I could be surrounded by people yet still feel lonely, that I would experience the highest highs and lowest lows, sometimes on the same day, that I would watch people grow old and also bury a lot of children, too many actually.

Here are a few interesting statistics from my 25 years as a priest, most of them liturgical and sacramental:

Total number of Divine Liturgies participated in-2,613

Total number of Divine Liturgies where I have served as the celebrant-2,461

Total number of Divine Liturgies where I have co-celebrated (served with another priest)-609

Total number of Divine Liturgies where I have served alone-2,002

Total number of baptisms-470

Total number of weddings-216

Total number of Chrismations-112

Total number of funerals-214

Total number of services-4,582

Total number of books written—9

Total number of years I have authored the Prayer Team daily—8 years and two months

In recognition of this day, in thanksgiving to God and in thanksgiving to this parish, to you my spiritual flock and my spiritual family, I want to invite you to a special Divine Liturgy to be celebrated on Monday, May 15 beginning at 6:00 p.m. (Orthros at 5:00 p.m.) There will be a dinner afterwards. I would love for you to share in this special day with me.

With Love in the Lord,

Fr. Stavros





# Christ is Risen... now what?

By: Vasili Panagopoulos

## **Christ is Risen! Χριστός Ανέστη!**

Before the service of the Great Canon on Holy Saturday evening, I had a couple of GOYAns pull me off to the side to ask me what they called a “Jesus question.” Paraphrasing, they asked two things: first, “why do we wait until Pascha to say “Christ is Risen? Isn’t He always Risen?” and second, “what is the time frame that we can say “Christ is Risen,” and are we allowed to say it outside of the perimeters of that time frame?” Two excellent questions, and unfortunately I had just a few seconds to answer as I had to prepare for the service.

## **Isn’t Christ always Risen?**

To the first question, yes, Christ is always Risen, but the Church has an Ecclesiastical calendar that is on repeat so-to-speak. It starts on September 1, and ends on August 31. Each year, on March 25 we remember, or more appropriately, we commemorate the Annunciation - the day that the Theotokos, the Virgin Mary, found out that God had chosen her to be the one to bear Christ., and so nine months later, we commemorate the birth of Christ. Similarly, just as it happened 2000 years ago, after the Jewish Passover, the Church commemorates the Resurrection of Christ, and then “backtracks” itself in chronological order for Holy Week, which is why the Crucifixion is commemorated on Good Friday, Palm Sunday is exactly one week before the Resurrection, and the day before Palm Sunday is Lazarus Saturday, so on and so forth.

## **When are we allowed to say “Christ is Risen?”**

To the second question, there are a few different answers. According to the Church, we chant the Apolytikion of the Resurrection, the “Christ is Risen” hymn for the forty days of Pascha. Additionally, we should be greeting our Orthodox family and friends with “Christ is Risen - Truly He is Risen,” even if it’s to people that we live with, for the forty days of Pascha. But, what about before or after the forty days, can we say “Christ is Risen?” Can we chant it in Church or at home? To that there is no black and white answer. In Church, we follow the Ecclesiastical Calendar, therefore, we have a set time when we sing that hymn in the Church during services... same thing with the Christmas hymns, Pentecost, and other feasts. The same applies with the hymns of saints, for example, St. Nektarios of Aegina is commemorated on November 9. He is a saint 365 days out of the year, and he always will be. Does that mean we can only chant his Apolytikion on November 9? In the Church, yes. At home, of course not! We don’t do it everyday, but a tradition in my home is to chant the Apolytikia of each of our patron saints: St. Basil the Great, St. Anna the Moth-

er of the Theotokos, St. Anthony the Great, and St. Paisios the Athonite, patron saint of our home, before we go to bed. So yes, we can chant Christ is Risen in our homes if we feel the desire to, and you should feel no shame or awkwardness doing so, because He is always Risen.

## **Christ is Risen, now what?**

I bring up this conversation for a reason, if Christ is always Risen, and we can always chant the “Christ is Risen” hymn, what do we do now? Not just for the forty days of Pascha, but after, into the summer, the fall, winter, and back again next spring when we start the Lenten journey all over again. Christ is Risen, but now what do we do?



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## How you decide to experience Christ's Resurrection is what you'll get out of it.

If you see it as a social event, or a reason to come to Church and receive the light and go home, then that's just about all you'll get from it. If you see it as a time to order a whole lamb and have a party, then you'll see it as just another holiday. Most commonly in my experience, and you see this most especially in other church denominations, if you see it as an event that took place 2000 years ago and you are simply "remembering it," then you really won't be living the Resurrection. "Christ's Resurrection should not be celebrated as a historical or social event, but as existential, which means that it should be a participation in the grace of the Resurrection... the purpose of the spiritual life is for one to be united with the Risen Christ, to see Him in one's heart" (Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, Hierotheos, The Twelve Feasts of the Lord). This is why the Holy Fathers put such an emphasis on Great Lent; increase in prayer; more attendance in Church; making your fasting rule a little more challenging; and above all else, receiving the Holy Sacraments of Confession and Communion regularly. All these things purify the senses. St. John of Damascus says, "Let us purify our senses and we shall behold Christ, radiant with the light ineffable of the Resurrection..."

If you're thinking, "well Vasili, Lent has already passed, what do I do now?" You can still purify the senses! Confession is not just for Lent, it is whenever you need it; Church isn't only open for Lent, it's always open.

You have an opportunity to pray, fast, read scripture or a spiritual book everyday, and you have the opportunity to receive Communion all the time! "You should only receive Communion when you are prepared, AND you should receive Communion every time it is offered" (Anonymous).

Christ is Risen, now what? Live a life in His Resurrection! He is always Risen! The light of Christ always illumines all! You can always come and receive the light! Purify the senses, receive the blessings of the Church as often as possible, this way you can always participate in the grace of the Resurrection!

On behalf of Moriah and Andoni, I wish all of you a wonderful Pascha season!

Truly He is Risen! Αληθώς Ανέστη!

**With love in our Risen Christ,  
Vasili**

## Successful Lenten Series Completed



During Lent this year, our Wednesday night series was entitled "First Things First: Making Time for the Things that Matter." We spent the six weeks of Lent talking about the words that comprise our core values—Worship, Community, Love, Learning and Service—and the last week we concluded with a presentation on Priorities. A different ministry hosted each week. We averaged 50-60 people each week. What a wonderful way to spend our Lenten season!





## Two Incredible Sundays of Charitable Giving

We finally closed the book on our Greek Festival for 2022. We netted approximately \$60K in profits after all the expenses were paid. As we decided before the Festival, all proceeds for the 2022 Festival would be offered to three charities—Agape Charities (50%), Love INC (25%) and LifePath Hospice (25%).

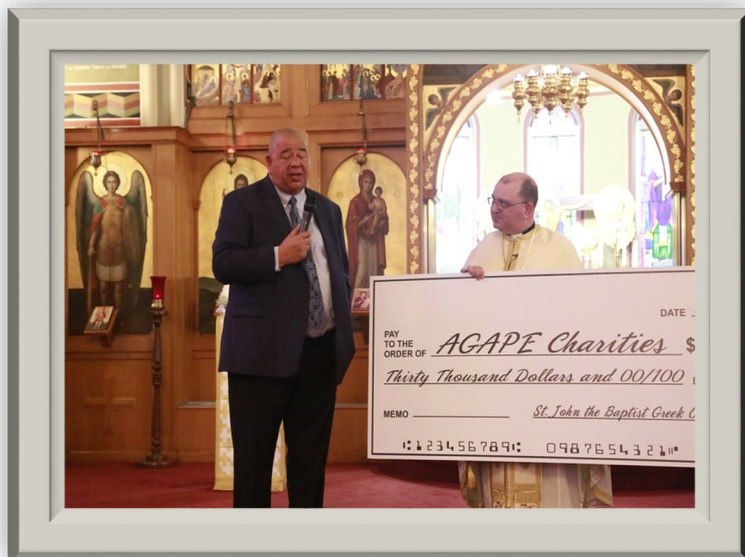


(25%)

On Sunday, March 26, we welcomed Jim Ketis from St. Katherine Greek Orthodox Church in Naples, who represented Agape Charities. We offered Agape Charities a check for \$30,000 for relief from Hurricane Ian, which will go directly to the continued recovery efforts.



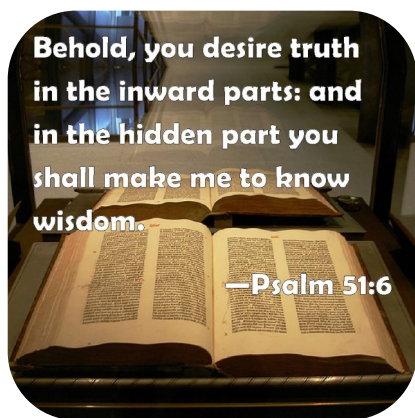
On Sunday, April 2, we welcomed representatives from LifePath and from Love INC and gave each organization \$15K as a donation. It is truly a blessing to be able to give back to this degree this year. Please know that our contributions are making a significant contribution to three very worthy causes.



# Sermon-Palm Sunday, 2023—Psalm 50:6—

## Teach me wisdom in my secret heart

One of my favorite Psalms is Psalm 50. It is read at every Orthros service in the Orthodox Church. It will be heard each night of this upcoming Holy Week. A priest prays the Psalm quietly during the Cherubic Hymn as he is censuring. If you ever wondered why my mouth is moving when I'm censuring, it is because I'm praying the 50th Psalm. Verse six of this Psalm says "Behold, You desire truth in the inward being. Therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart." At every service this Holy Week, I'm going to highlight a verse of Scripture, and this is the verse for today. Psalm 51:6—"Behold, You desire truth in the inward being, therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart."



For those who know the origin of Psalm 50, it was written by David, after he had his friend murdered and committed adultery with his friend's wife. Nathan the prophet called him out on that. And David knew that no one and nothing could take away his guilt and shame besides the Lord. There wasn't a family member, a friend, or one of his subjects, workers or soldiers that could get to him and the deep shame he carried in his heart. Only God.

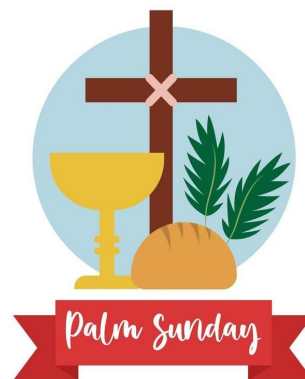
I'm convinced that each of us has one percent of our hearts that we are unwilling to give to anyone else—not our spouse, not our best friend, not our therapist, not even to our spiritual father in confession. A secret hurt, a secret pain, a secret shame that is too ugly for us to admit. Jesus said in John 10:10, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." He wasn't talking about money, possessions, fame or security. He was talking about peace. The kind of peace that passes all understanding that we heard about in the Epistle lesson today from St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians, the kind of peace that no amount of money can buy, the kind of peace that can only come from Him.

One of the things I've learned this Lent in sitting down with so many of you in confession, and even in casual conversation, is that many of us are not enjoying the

abundant life that Christ intended for us to enjoy. Our sinful state has brought an abundance of shame. Relationships, friendships, marriages are not having the abundance of joy that Christ intended for them to have. Turn on the news and all you'll find is an abundance of anger. And in the rat race we are all in, with the state of our economy, we have an abundance of frustration.

So, if you are tired, angry, frustrated, ashamed and in need of some renewal and restoration, you are in the right place. And if you don't have any of these things, if you are filled with joy today, praise God, and you are also in the right place. Because this Holy Week journey is designed to take us through all of the human emotions—from the shame of the Fall and our sinful nature, to the healing that comes through Holy Unction, to the fatigue of the standing, to the pain of the cross and to the joy of the Resurrection.

The prophet Isaiah, many centuries before Christ, wrote these words, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Hearken diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in fatness." (Isaiah 55:2) In other words, why do you spend your money on that which isn't the bread that sustains life, and why do we labor for money which at the end will never truly satisfy us? Listen diligently to God, because He is good, and delight yourself in fatness, eat excessively from His table.



Today is Palm Sunday. It is the beginning of Holy Week. It is a day when the churches are packed with people, some of whom come regularly and some who rarely come at all. Today begins the busiest week of the year from a liturgical standpoint. The altar table will be the place for the heavenly banquet of Holy Communion every day this week. And we are invited to come and eat excessively off of it, in a way that we cannot any other week of the year.

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The calendar is filled with services, familiar rituals, beloved hymns, meaningful Scripture readings. The church is decorated this morning in festive colors. Our beautiful children carried their palms around the church, imitating the children who waved branches and cheered on Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem two thousand years ago. In past years, I've preached about the crowd, how so many people cheered for Jesus on Palm Sunday, and only five days later, they demanded that He be crucified.

Today, rather than focusing on the crowd, I want to focus on the individuals in the crowd, you, me, everyone who is in the crowd, who each carries something heavy in their secret heart. And I want to invite you to bring that thing, whatever it is, to Christ this week. A few less nights out, a few less sports games, a few less aimless nights of TV watching, missing these things this week isn't going to hurt any of us. Spend the time here, re-learning, reliving and recommitting. Give Christ the key to your secret heart and let Him put joy where there is shame, hope where there is sadness, confidence where there is doubt, peace where there is anxiety, and rest where there is exhaustion.

Our verse of the year in our parish is Joshua 24:15, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Many years ago, the "crowd" of the world may not have flocked to the churches, but at least it flocked to Christian values and virtues. It looked like the crowd on Palm Sunday two thousand years ago. There have always been uncommitted people in the crowd, or curiosity seekers, who could metaphorically wave the palms and shout for Jesus. The crowd in the world today is starting

AS FOR ME  
AND MY  
house  
WE  
WILL SERVE THE  
lord  
JOSHUA 24:15

to resemble the crowd on Good Friday, the blood-thirsty mob that demanded the death of Jesus. It's starting to feel like the mob is going to start to demand the death of Christianity. And this is going to be a time when we are going to have to decide, each person and his household, which god we will serve. Because in Joshua 24:15, before we get to the few words that we have highlighted this year, there are other words. "And if you be unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

It's getting to be time to decide which "god" we are going to serve—the god of the economy, the gods of political causes, or do we place ourselves as god, as we proclaim "my truth"? Or are we going to serve the Lord, Jesus Christ, and will we accept Him as THE way, THE truth and THE life? As for me and this household of our church, we will serve the Lord, as best as we can.

During this Lenten season, we had a Wednesday night series, where we again highlighted each week, one of our core values of our community—love, worship, community, learning, and service. This past Wednesday, we summarized all of this with the word "priorities."

And we talked candidly about how making God the priority is hard. The first of the Ten Commandments says "I am the Lord Your God, you will have no other gods before me." Which leads to the question, what is the thing you put first in your life? Is it God, or it is something else? And what is it that keeps us from putting God first? Is it that we don't know Him? Or do we know Him but it is too hard to give Him the first place in our lives?



I read a great quote the other day about priorities. It said "There is a difference between interest and commitment. When you're interested in something, you do it when it's convenient. When you've committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results." We are all interested today for sure, or we wouldn't be here. But are we committed? Giving God the first of our time each morning with prayer, giving God the first of each week with worship, giving God the first fruits of our labor when it comes to our stewardship offering—these are really hard concepts. But carrying around the baggage in our secret heart is a heavy weight. Can making God the priority, can making a commitment to pray, worship, serve and give, no excuses, will that put wisdom in our secret heart? Yes, absolutely it will.

A lot of this doesn't make sense—not just the stories and the parables—but the actions that are supposed to follow them. How are we supposed to lead with humility in a world that leads with pride? How are we supposed to experience love in a world that is changing what the word love means?

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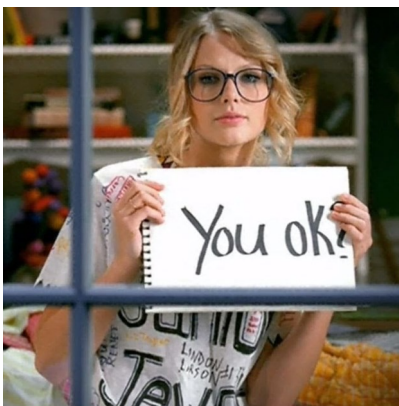
In John 12:15, which we heard in the Gospel lesson, Jesus sat on a donkey to fulfill a prophecy which said “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!” He’s not leading a rally or a protest, He’s not smiling smugly behind a microphone, He’s not chastising people. He’s humbly riding on a donkey, to show that the path to love is humility, that we are filled with God only when we empty ourselves of pride. And we can convince the world that there isn’t a secret heart filled with pain, doubt, fear and anxiety, but we can’t fool ourselves.



While we are all busy, all of us have idle time to think. The question is, what do we think about? Again going to the Epistle lesson, Saint Paul tells us, “Brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8) If God is really a priority, if we are committed to following Him, then we are going to have to do some restructuring in the way we think. And that’s a good thing. Thinking about things that are honorable, just, pure, lovely and gracious, these things are the way that God brings wisdom and peace into our secret hearts. If you are committed to coming to the services this week and beyond, but especially this week, there is no doubt that by the end of this journey, you will have received some wisdom for your secret heart.

I’m going to close off this sermon with something that is of interest to our young people. A special person in their world is about to enter Tampa this week—

her name is Taylor Swift. She actually had three concerts this week at Raymond James Stadium—Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights—so if you are coming to church from up that way, make some extra time because traffic will be heavy—think crowds in Jerusalem, except everyone has a



car. Anyway, one of Taylor Swift’s songs is called “You Belong to Me.” I watched the video and it has 1.4 BILLION views on YouTube. The song is about a girl who really likes the guy who lives next door to her. Except the boy never notices her, somehow he always ends up with the popular girls, who don’t know him like she does, who don’t treat him like she would. The refrain of the song says the words of her heart—Dreaming about the day when you wake up and find, that what you’re looking for has been here the whole time. If you could see that I’m the one who understands you, been here all along. So why can’t you see? You belong with me!

This song is not a Christian song, but these words, taken out of context, can speak to the Church, to Christ and to you. Regarding the church, it’s like we would say “we, the church, have dreaming about the day when you, the parishioners, wake up and find that what you are looking for—freedom in Christ, because He’s the one that can fill the empty spaces of your secret heart—has been here the whole time.”

And then when we turn it over to Christ, and He says, “If you could see that I’M the one who understands you. I’ve been here all along. YOU belong to ME.”

YOU  
belong  
TO ME

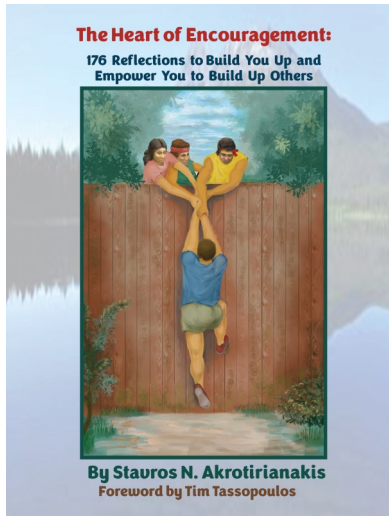
The wisdom we need in our secret hearts is not secret wisdom. It’s not even private wisdom. It is the universal message of Christ, revealed to humanity for the past two thousand years. It’s that we belong to Him, He’s the one who understands us. He’s the one who can save us. He’s the one that will never abandon us or give up on us. This is the truth that can change your life, if you let it penetrate your inner being.

Behold you desire truth in the inward being. Therefore, teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Behold, He is the truth that bring peace, comfort, purpose and hope to our inward being. Therefore, open yourself this week, and let Him put wisdom in your secret heart. Amen.



# 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*

### God Is an Optimist—

### We Should Be as Well



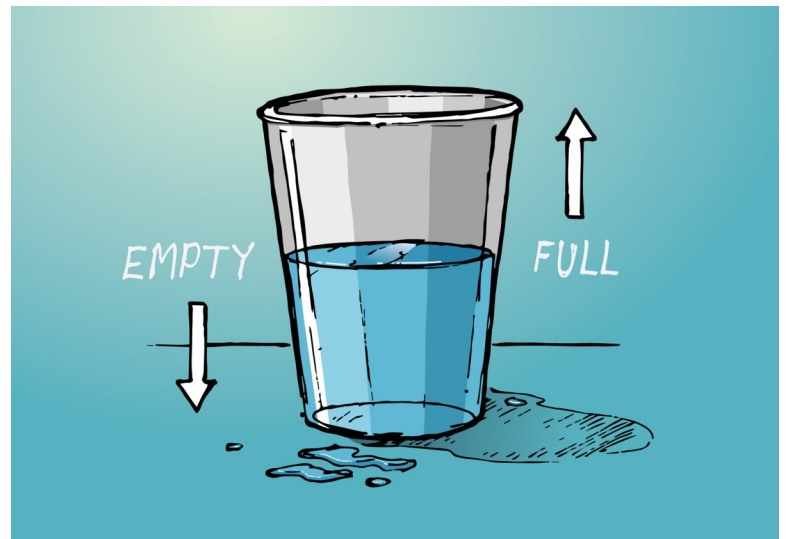
He who diligently seeks good seeks favor, but evil come to him who searches for it.

Proverbs 11:27

When our son was young, one show that he watched was a cartoon about a young boy who was bald and kind of awkward.

He had a mother and father and a baby sister, so thankfully, this cartoon presented what appeared to be a stable home life. However, when I watched this cartoon, the mother would consistently annoy me because she seemed to be the consummate pessimist. It seemed that she was always ten steps ahead on what could go wrong. If the little boy would say something like, "I'm going outside to play," she would respond with something like, "Well, I hope you don't get hurt or killed," "Don't fall off the swing set and die," or "I hope a car doesn't plow through our fence and kill you." Now I'm exaggerating a bit, but it's like she could never quite say, "Have a great time." She always managed to temper her son's joy with some kind of ominous warning.

We've all heard the terms "glass half-empty" and "glass half-full." These describe how people see a glass that contains 50 percent liquid and 50 percent space—some will see that glass as half-full and others as half-empty. Optimists are the ones who see the glass half-full while pessimists see it as half-empty. In the aforementioned cartoon, the mom was certainly a glass half-empty person.



Is God an optimist or pessimist? Does He see the glass as half-full or half-empty? I believe there is strong evidence that God is an optimist. In 1 Thessalonians 5:15, the verse that this unit is based on, we read that we are not to repay evil for evil. Rather, we are to seek to do good to one another. So, if a situation is evil, we are not supposed to meet evil with evil but instead to meet evil with good. In fact, St. Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 5:15, tells us that we are to "always seek to do good to one another and to all."

Continued...

“To all” means exactly that—we are supposed to do good to all, even those who are not good to us. Jesus is emphatic in Luke 6: 27–28 when He says, “But I say to you that hear, love your enemies, do go to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” In Matthew 18:21–22, we read that Peter asked Jesus, “‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?’” Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.’”

The Bible gives dozens upon dozens of examples of God’s patience, mercy, and forgiveness. One would have to see some good in someone to have that degree of patience, mercy, and forgiveness.

Encouragement and optimism go hand in hand. That is because optimism sees the good in people and situations. Optimists see the good that can come out of a situation. Pessimists are always looking for the bad. That doesn’t mean that optimists don’t occasionally feel pessimistic or that they don’t get upset, frustrated, or sad. Reality is somewhere between optimism and pessimism, and it’s important that we are real.



However, optimism or pessimism are ways of looking at the world, a mindset that we develop over time. It’s like the difference between the teacher who tells his or her students, “You are all starting off with an A, and it’s yours to lose,” versus the teacher who says, “You are all starting off with an F, and you have to earn your way out of it.” Or saying, “I want you to succeed and will give you every opportunity” versus “You are going to fail, but I want you to prove me wrong.”

We tend to find what we are looking for. If we are looking for good, we will probably find it. If we are looking for bad, we will probably find it. There are people who consistently look for the bad—a hair out of place, a small wrinkle or blemish, and they seize on the smallest thing gone wrong. They hear their children talk joyfully about going out to play with their friends, and rather than telling them to have a great time, they give a lecture

about all the things that could go wrong. And then those children leave the house, many of them without confidence and their heads filled with doomsday scenarios. That doesn’t mean that the optimist doesn’t tell their children to be careful. That would be irresponsible. But rather than harp on what could go wrong, they think about what could go right as they encourage their children to have fun and make new friends.

If God is an optimist, and He must be, if He wants so badly to redeem a fallen world, then we as encouragers must be optimists as well. We are to see the good in things, people, and situations. Optimism is also tied to gratitude. When we are thankful, we are also optimistic; we see the good in what we have rather than frustration over what we do not have. God wants us to get to heaven. He wants us to be successful.

There is a beautiful line in an Orthodox prayer from the Sacrament of Holy Unction that reads, “You have not created man for destruction, but for the keeping of Your commandments, and for the inheriting of life incorruptible.”<sup>15</sup> God did not create us to be destructive or negative. He did not create us to look at one another destructively or negatively. He created us so we might inherit eternal life. His message is one of encouragement. Our messages to one another should be encouraging as well.

God is an optimist. Encouragers are optimists as well. Work at learning to see the good in people. That doesn’t mean there won’t be bad or that we shouldn’t correct the bad. It’s developing a mindset to see the good in people and give people the benefit of the doubt rather than starting out with the doubt.

Lord, when You look at my life, please see the good in me. Forgive my shortcomings. Help me to learn from my mistakes. Help me to have a positive outlook on life and people. Help me to see the good in others and for others to see the good in me. Help me to be an optimist and encourager, to see the possibilities for joy and success in others and situations I will encounter today. Amen.

**Encouragement Challenge:** Choose to see the good in people and situations today, and when you see it, encourage it!

*Choose to  
see the  
Good in people.*



# Sermon-Pascha 2023

by Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis

I wish there was a sermon I could give that had everyone committing their lives to Christ, that could provide complete understanding about Jesus Christ and why He matters, one that could clear up all doubts, including my own, one that would fill this church every Sunday as it is tonight. There is no sermon that can do that. There are plenty of sermons that stir thoughts, sermons way better than the ones I give. There are plenty of choirs that stir emotions that sing on bigger stages than ours does. There are plenty of beautiful churches even more spectacular than ours. And while these things—sermons, songs and churches—encourage us to grow in faith, it all boils down to a personal decision to open your heart and let Christ in there. Not just tonight when it's cool for everyone to show up for Pascha. Not just at GOYA meetings when we get to hang out with our friends. It's about letting Him in when life is hard. It's about putting Him at the center and not just trying to fit Him into our busy schedule. It's about showing up even you have doubts, even when He's disappointed you, even when it's not the cool thing to do.

I spent part of this evening at Tampa General Hospital. I baptized a new-born baby. Her name is Elena. If she lives to see the sunrise tomorrow it will be a miracle. As I walked into the room to meet her and her parents, the first words her mother said to me were "We are joyful, we are celebrating the birth of our daughter, we feel peace." I asked Elena's parents if I could mention her tonight and they said I could. Because in their moment of trauma and terror, they aren't running from Christ, they are running to Him, they asked for His church in my humble person to be with them. In what will eventually become chaos, they feel peace, the kind of peace that St. Paul talks about in Philippians 4:7, the peace of God that passes all understanding, the peace that God can bring in the midst of conflict, the peace that God can give when we turn to Him, in both the happy moments and the stressful ones.



One of my favorite TV shows when I was a child was called Emergency 51, and it was about firefighters. They would be sitting around the fire station, the alarm would go off, and they would all jump off the truck and head to the next emergency. I imagine for real life firefighters, there has to be an adrenaline rush each time that bell goes off.

There might be some fear about an unknown crisis they are about to step into, but there is a confidence in their training, a calmness that comes with experience, and a boldness that says "we got this."



Well, we have emergencies all the time in life. Unexpected things happen all the time, good and bad things. Who provides the adrenaline, the confidence, the calmness and the boldness? For me, the answer is Christ. Sometimes He's the only one I can count on for these things. This is why it's necessary to learn, this is why it's necessary to come, this is why we belong, because life is hard and many times, He's the only way we can get through.

Christ is not only the Lord of crisis—He is the Lord of joy as well. He was in my tears tonight. But He was also in my laughs today. We don't only go to Him when it's all going wrong. We go to Him in thanksgiving when it's all going right.

The theme of this service is light. In a few moments I will turn around from this table and bring one solitary light into the church. This will be an act of joy for me, I'm alive one more year to do this. It will be an act of reassurance that even a little light takes away darkness. And it will be an act of boldness—no darkness is going to extinguish this light. And then you will receive the light—and you can choose how to receive it.

Continued...

For those who are cold and shivering because life has beaten you down, receive it as a source of warmth. For those who are feeling confident, think of the afterburners on a jet engine, let it ignite your soul and push it to even greater heights. And for those of us who are in between these two extremes, receive it with some sense of recommitment—don't just make this some empty ritual we do each year to celebrate the Resurrection. Make it something that makes a difference in your life. Make some kind of recommitment to Him tonight—a commitment to belong, to come, to forgive, to do better, the choice is yours.



This is not the night to beg people to come to church more. It's a night to beg you to come to Christ. Because when you put Him in the center, all the other things fall into place, including His church.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30, "come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." I know there are lots of you who are heavy laden—with work, stress, or shame—come receive this light, not just on your candle, but in your soul, in your secret heart.

I will close our Lenten journey and this sermon with a prayer that combines Psalm 50 and the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil:

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

For You, Lord, are the helper of the helpless, the hope of the hopeless, the Savior of the afflicted the haven of the voyager and the physician of the sick. Be all things to all people, You who knows each person, his request, his household and his need.

For You, Christ our God, are the true joy and gladness of those who love You, and all creation praises You forever. Amen.

## Inspiration

### Be Careful of Snakes—Author Unknown

A woman had a pet snake that she loved very much. The snake was about 7 ft long and one day it just stopped eating. After several weeks of trying everything the lady still couldn't get the snake to eat. The woman took the snake to the vet and explained her situation. The vet replies "I see ..has your snake been sleeping with you at night or snuggling real close and stretching himself out?" The woman said "Yes. Everyday and it makes me so sad that I can't help him feel better." The vet says to the lady "Ma'am your snake is not sick. It has been preparing to eat you. He's been sizing you up everyday so he knows how big he has to be. He's not eating so he has enough room to digest you.

#### Moral of the Story:

Recognize the snakes around you. Everyone's intentions aren't pure. Just cause they seem close to you, doesn't mean their intentions aren't to devour you.

Some people aren't PRAYING for you they're PREYING on you!!

## CHURCH DONATIONS & STEWARDSHIP CHECKS



There has been an increase of missing information on checks & donations.

We kindly ask to verify the following before submitting payment.

THANK  
YOU

1) IS THE NAME YOU USE TO PLEDGE / DONATE BEFORE, THE SAME AS WHAT IS WRITTEN ON YOUR CHECK?  
IF NOT PLEASE WRITE IT ON THE CHECK

2) ON YOUR CHECK, ON THE FOR/MEMO LINE, PLEASE MAKE SURE TO STATE IF THE CHECK IS FOR STEWARDSHIP, CHRISTMAS, EASTER OR ANY OTHER DONATION.

3) IF POSSIBLE, PLEASE DON'T POST DATE CHECKS

4) WHEN MAKING A PAYMENT VIA SUBSPASH, PLEASE MAKE SURE TO SELECT THE **CORRECT YEAR** WHEN MAKING A STEWARDSHIP DONATION.

IF MAKING A DIFFERENT TYPE OF PAYMENT/ DONATION, PLEASE WRITE IT IN THE MEMO BOX.



# Liturgical Schedule for May

Friday, May 5

**St. Irene the Martyr**

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

**St. Irene the Martyr**



Sunday, May 7

**Sunday of the Paralytic**

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

Monday, May 8

**St. John the Theologian/  
St. Arsenios the Great**

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

Wednesday, May 10

**Mid-Pentecost**

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

Sunday, May 14

**Sunday of the Samaritan Woman**

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

Monday, May 15

**St. Pachomios  
25 Year Ordination Anniversary of  
Fr. Stavros**

Orthros 5:00 p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:00 p.m.

**Sunday of the Samaritan Women**



Wednesday, May 17

Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, May 21

**Sts. Constantine and  
Helen/Sunday of the Blind Man**

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

Tuesday, May 23

**Apodosis (Leave-Taking) of Pascha**

Orthros 5:00 p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:00 p.m.

Thursday, May 25

**Ascension**

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

Sunday, May 28

**Sunday of the Holy Fathers  
of the First Ecumenical Council**

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

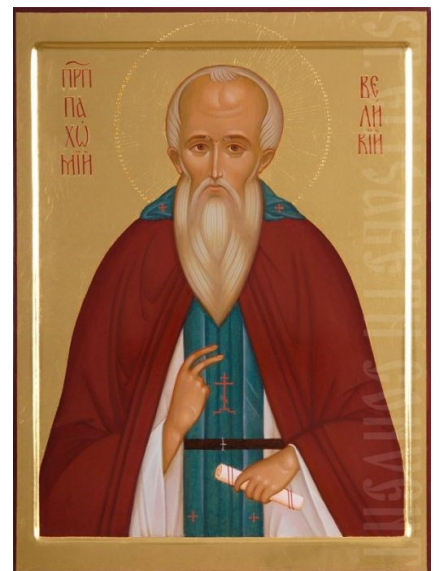
Saturday, June 3

**Saturday of the Souls**

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

*Memorial Service at the Conclusion of the Divine Liturgy*

**St. Pachomios**



Sunday, June 4

**Pentecost**

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

Vespers of the Descent of the Holy Spirit 11:00 a.m.

# Liturgical Notes for May



**The Pentecostarion - The 50 Days After Pascha** The period of 50 days between Pascha & Pentecost is referred to as the “Pentecostarion.” The period of forty days between Pascha Sunday and the day of the Ascension is known as the period of Pascha (or Easter). It is a period set aside by the Church for the specific celebration of Christ’s glorious resurrection. It is a celebration of “rebirth”. . . .The rebirth of God’s creation which surrounds us, and the rebirth of the spirit within each and every one of us! This period is not merely a ritualistic celebration but a celebration which can be seen, felt, heard and talked about. It is a very REAL celebration which CAN make our entire being jump with JOY. It is a celebration which offers us HOPE. It is a celebration which offers us the TRUE FREEDOM found only in Jesus Christ! During the 40 days of Pascha, we are to greet each other with the greeting “Christ is Risen” or “Χριστὸς Ανέστη!,” to which the response is “Truly He is Risen” or “Ἀληθῶς Ανέστη!”

**No Kneeling until Pentecost** It is actually the Tradition in the Orthodox Church that we not kneel on Sundays in honor of the Resurrection of Christ. Because we do not worship on a daily basis in our church communities, priests have encouraged people to kneel on Sundays, the thought being that if we do not kneel on Sundays, that we’ll never kneel in church. It is a Tradition, that for 50 days after Pascha, we do not kneel in honor of the Resurrection. The next time we will kneel after April 16 is on the Feast of Pentecost (June 4) at the Vespers of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, when the priest says “Again and again on bended knees let us pray to the Lord.”

**Friday, May 5 - Feast of St. Irene** - St. Irene was a martyr of the 4th century. Many miracles have been attributed to her. She is the patron saint of law enforcement officers.

**Sunday, May 7 - Sunday of the Paralytic** The healing of the paralytic who was afflicted for many years. This event bears witness to Christ’s authority over the human body: He who can overcome death in His own body has power over all human flesh.



**Monday, May 8 - Feast of St. John the Theologian and St. Arsenios** On May 8, we celebrate the feast days of St. John the Theologian, the author of the fourth Gospel, as well as the Epistles of St. John and the book of Revelation, and also celebrate the feast of St. Arsenios, a monk of the 5th Century.



### **Wednesday, May 10 – Feast of Mid-Pentecost**

The icon depicts Christ the teacher, foreshadows the teaching to the Samaritan Woman, celebrated the following Sunday, and it is the feast day of teachers. About the middle of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus went up again to the Temple and taught. The Jews, marveling at the wisdom of His words, said, “How does this man know letters having never learned?” But Christ first reproached their unbelief and lawlessness, then proved to them by the Law that they sought to slay Him unjustly, supposedly as a despiser of the Law, since He had healed the paralytic on the Sabbath. This feast is held mid-way between Pascha and Pentecost.

**Sunday, May 14 - Sunday of the Samaritan Woman** Christ talks about the water of eternal life which will never make us thirst again. The woman here is St. Photini.

**Monday, May 15 - Feast of St. Pachomios**—Fr. Stavros’ Anniversary of Ordination - Fr. Stavros was ordained to the Holy Priesthood of the Greek Orthodox Church on May 15, 1998. This will mark his 25th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. Every year, Fr. Stavros marks this anniversary by celebrating Divine Liturgy in thanksgiving for the gift of priestly ministry.

**Wednesday, May 17 – 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 May, the Paraklesis will be offered on Wednesday Evening, May 17, from 6:00--7:00 p.m.

**Sunday, May 21 - Sts. Constantine and Helen** May 21 commemorates the feast of Sts. Constantine and Helen.



St. Constantine was the emperor of the Roman Empire who decided to make Christianity the official religion of the empire. For the first time in history, the Christian church would not fall under persecution. St. Constantine also moved the capital of the Empire from Rome to Constantinople (present day Istanbul, Turkey), where he inaugurated the Byzantine Empire which flourished from 325 until 1453. He also convened the first Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in the year 325, which inaugurated what is known as the “golden age of Orthodoxy,” and resulted in the writing of the Nicene Creed (edited to its current version in the year 381). St. Helen, the mother of St. Constantine, is recognized as being the person who found the true cross of Christ in Jerusalem. She went on a pilgrimage to the Holy City and searched diligently for the Cross, finding it under a patch of Basil (Vasiliko) on the Mountain of Golgotha. Sts. Constantine and Helen have the title Isapostolou, “Equal to the Apostles” because of the tremendous contributions they made to the Orthodox Christian Church.

**Sunday, May 21 - Sunday of the Blind Man** - The theme of LIGHT! Commemoration of the healing of the blind man which leads us to the reality of the healing of our own spiritual blindness.

**Tuesday, May 23- Apodosi (Leave-Taking) of Pascha** -This marks the end of the Paschal Season. It is a repeat of the Resurrection Service and Liturgy of Pascha and is the last time of the Liturgical year that we sing Χριστός Ανέστη.

We will celebrate this feast on Tuesday, May 31, with an evening Liturgy at 6:00 p.m. (Orthros will begin at 5:00 p.m. and is a replication of the Resurrection Service from Pascha).

### **Thursday, May 25 - Ascension**

This marks the feast where Christ ascended to heaven, 40 days after the Resurrection, thus completing His earthly ministry.

**Sunday, May 28, Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council**—We pay homage to the collective triumph of the Church over false doctrine. The first Ecumenical Council authored the Creed. It took place in Nicaea in the year 325. This is why we call the Creed “The Nicene Creed.” This Council also established the date of Pascha and decided on which books would comprise the Bible. This commemoration is always done the Sunday after Ascension.

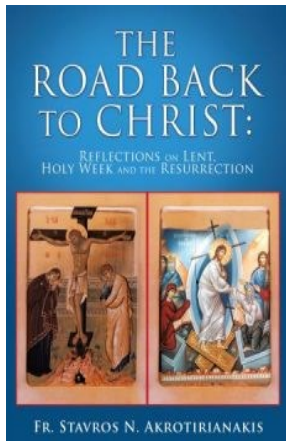


**Saturday, June 3, Saturday of the Souls**—There are four Saturdays set aside during the year for us to honor our loved ones who have fallen asleep. One of them is the Saturday before Pentecost, this year on June 11. We will have Divine Liturgy and a memorial service that day. Please send the list of names of those whom you would like to have commemorated (separate sheet provided). You may bring kolyva as you wish. We will not be having a communal kolyva (hopefully this will resume next year), so each family will take their own back.

**Sunday, June 4, Pentecost**—This feast commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles fifty days after Pascha, filling them with power, strength, wisdom and courage to spread the GOOD NEWS of Jesus Christ to the entire world. Pentecost is the celebration of the birth of the Christian Church!!!. A special Vespers Service will be held after Divine Liturgy on Pentecost (June 4), where three prayers will be offered, asking for the Holy Spirit to descend upon us as we mark this feast day. As a reminder, we do NOT kneel in church until AFTER the Divine Liturgy on Pentecost (we do not kneel at the Divine Liturgy on Pentecost) at the Vespers of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, when the priest says “Again and again ON BENDED KNEES let us pray to the Lord.” There is no fasting the week after Pentecost. However, there is a fast for the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul which lasts from the Monday after all Saints Day (June 12), so this year it is 16 days long. The length of the fast period is determined by the date of Pascha each year.







## 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 was February 5) through All Saints Day (this year that is June 11). Pick up your copy today so you can begin reading it. All monies taken in at the bookstore go to the church.

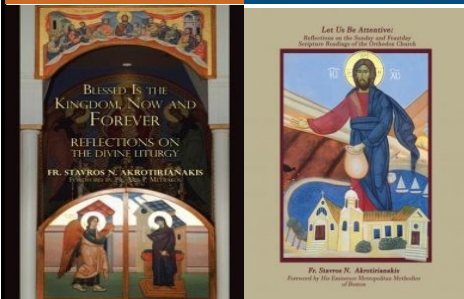
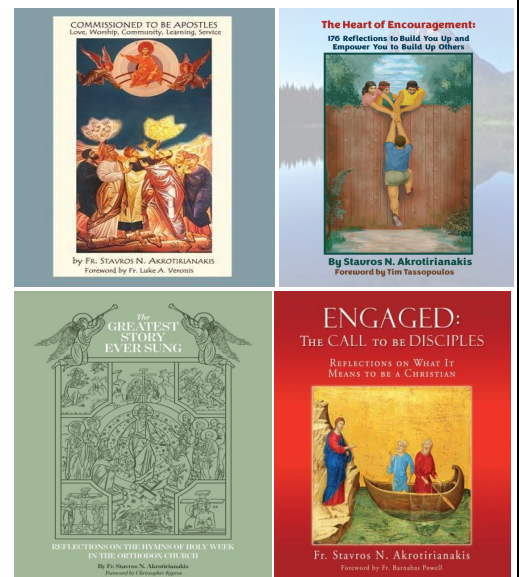
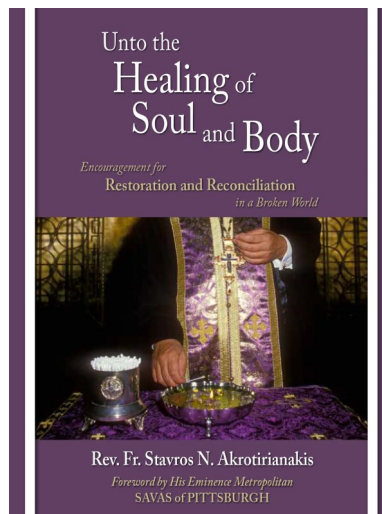
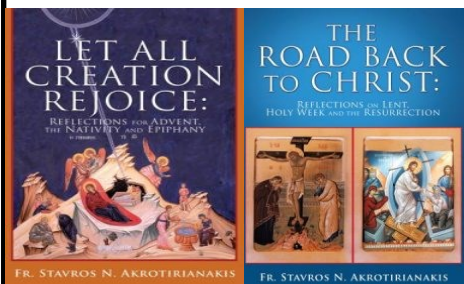
## Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

**Over 3,960 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](mailto: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](http://PrayerTeam365.com)  
Check it out! Search by topic and grow in your faith today!

Father Stavros has authored NINE 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*  
*The Greatest Story Ever Sung: Reflections on the Hymns of Holy Week In the Orthodox Church*  
**NEW: *Unto the Healing of Soul and Body: Encouragement for Restoration and Reconciliation in a Broken World***



# Unto the Healing of Soul and Body

*Encouragement for  
Restoration and Reconciliation  
in a Broken World*



Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis

*Foreword by His Eminence Metropolitan  
SAVAS of PITTSBURGH*

**Introducing the Newest Book by Fr.  
Stavros**

**Unto the Healing of Soul and Body:  
Encouragement for Restoration and  
Reconciliation in a Broken World**

There has never been a greater need for healing in the world than there is today. The Orthodox Sacrament of Holy Unction is intended for the healing of soul and body. What makes this sacrament so powerful is not just the anointing that occurs at the end of the service, but the journey there—through seven Epistle readings, seven Gospel passages and seven powerful prayers. *Unto the Healing of Soul and Body* will serve as an aid on this journey, helping us understand our need for healing, as well as God's role and our own participation in spiritual healing.

The Sacrament of Holy Unction, celebrated on Holy Wednesday and at other times throughout the year, lasts about 90 minutes. Yet, that time is packed with such spiritual richness that it deserves to be reflected upon more deeply. This book contains 46 reflections on the hymns, Scripture readings and prayers of the service.

The human body is comprised of mind, body and spirit, all of which are interrelated. When one part of the body suffers, so do the other part. For every physical wound, there is also a spiritual consequence. This book not only reflects on God's ability to heal our physical infirmities, but especially how our souls can be healed along with our bodies. In the times when our bodies are beyond physical healing—at some point we will all suffer a physical death—Holy Unction serves as a reconciliation with God and a preparation for eternal life. This service includes many prayers offering forgiveness, many which speak of the mercy of God, and many which speak of the ultimate destination, eternal life. The sacraments of the church provides us a means to prepare for eternal life, by offering us the spiritual stamina to get through this life.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Fr. George Livanos, an exemplary priest for over thirty years, who won the battle for his soul, even as he lost his battle with cancer. Father George's bishop, His Eminence Metropolitan Savas of Pittsburgh, has written the foreword for this book, paying tribute to one of his long-time faithful priests.



# TWELVE DISCIPLES PROJECT



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

On May 6, the Orthodox Church commemorates the Prophet Job who lived about 1600 years before Christ, in the era of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In fact, Job was a fifth generation descendent of Abraham. Job lived a very pious and just life and was blessed with much wealth and a lovely family.

Satan, unable to accept such a righteous individual, conspired against God (a bet), that if Job were to lose all his fortune and family, he would turn against God. Satan told God: "touch what Job values and see if he (still) continues to be pious and just." (Job 1:11). So Job lost his cattle and even his own children. Nevertheless, as all these adversities struck, Job prayerfully remained steadfast, not sinning against the Lord, or blaming God for his losses as he maintained a prayerful attitude as a model of virtue throughout his misfortunes. You may have listened to readings from the book of Job read during Great Lent, especially during Holy Week on Holy Thursday Morning and Holy Friday afternoon.

Job displaying great humility, patience, and virtue offered prayers only for his friends, not himself. Having observed Job's conduct, the Lord chose to restore all of Job's losses giving him twice as much as he previously had, and Job continued to live to an old age.

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

You too may join us in this endeavor that, not only broadens your community awareness with others in our congregation, but also sharpens each of our personal prayer disciplines.

"Pray for others by name and ask people to pray for you, too. The Church is a praying Body. When we pray for others, we lift them up and embrace them. It connects us in Christ, no matter how far away our loved ones may be from us. Prayer is even more intimate when we offer up specific people, by name, (and their specific needs) to the Lord." (Sam Williams, [blogs.goarch.org](http://blogs.goarch.org), Sept. 24, 2015)

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 during the day when you can spend a quiet moment with God.

If you'd like to participate (to enjoy the presence of God as you develop your prayer rule) and receive the prayer along with at least one page of names to pray for, please contact

Mathew Balasis, 727-345-4855([mathewbalasis@verizon.net](mailto:mathewbalasis@verizon.net)).

Participation will warm your spiritual heart.



St. John's

## YOUTH PROTECTION PROGRAM

**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](mailto:smpileggi1@gmail.com) or (813) 244-5855.**



### **GIFT CARD DONATIONS FOR THE FOOD PANTRY**

**GIFT CARDS IN ANY AMOUNT FOR PUBLIX, WALMART OR SAVE-A-LOT ARE GREATLY APPRECIATED! FEEL FREE TO DROP THEM OFF TO OUR OFFICE ADMIN. ASSISTANT MONDAY - FRIDAY 8AM- 5PM OR MAIL THEM IN. THANK YOU!**

### **Altar Angels**

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 Toula Trakas, Jackie Voulgaris, Skip Higdon, Georgia Diamantakes and Kathy Kaburis. We are a great team! God Bless You All!





# St. John the Baptist Community News

**Meeting of Ministry Heads**—We will have a meeting of ministry heads on Tuesday, May 9, in the Kourmolis Center at 6:30 p.m. We ask that each ministry send at least one representative. We meet periodically to check in and to look over the next few months in the life of our parish.

**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 May, the dates are Monday, May 1; Monday, May 8; Tuesday, May 16; Monday, May 22; and Tuesday, May 30.

**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 May, the dates are Tuesday, May 2; Tuesday, May 9; Tuesday, May 16 and Tuesday, May 23.

**GOYA**—The GOYA meeting for May will be Sunday, May 7, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

**Parea Dancers**—Our Parea Dance Group (GOYAns) will be having a monthly practice one Sunday each month after the Divine Liturgy. Our May practice will be on Sunday, May 21.

**Young Adults**—Our Young Adult Group will meet for dinner/discussion on Thursday, May 11 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. Our last young adult meeting in April had 26 young adults in attendance.



**Men's Group**—Our men's group will meet on Sunday, May 21, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Any men of our community are welcome to join us for dinner, discussion. Please bring \$20—we will order in for dinner. This will be our last meeting for the spring. We will resume meeting in August.

**College student night**—Tuesday, June 6—we are planning a summer get together at the church for any college students in the area for Tuesday, June 6, from 6:00-9:00 p.m. There is no cost. Please RSVP to Fr. Stavros by Thursday, June 1 at [frstav@gmail.com](mailto:frstav@gmail.com)





## JOY Tweens

On April 30, JOY Tweens had their last meeting with Father Stavros for the 2022-2023 school year.

On Friday, May 5, 2023, JOY Tweens will celebrate the end of the school year with dinner and a movie! More details to follow in the JOY Tweens Constant Contact.

Thank you to everyone who came and participated in our JOY Tween events this year. It was a wonderful first year of fun and fellowship for our 4th to 6th graders! We hope all our tweens enjoyed themselves and are looking forward to another fun year of activities in 2023-2024. If any parents would like to be involved in planning activities for our JOY Tweens prior to the start of the new school year, please contact Maraquet Edquid, 813-422-8963. Have a great summer!







*Have a heart, lend a hand,  
and make a difference.*

# COMMUNITY OUTREACH 2023

OUR SCHEDULE FOR THE REMAINING MONTHS OF 2023 IS  
AS FOLLOWS:

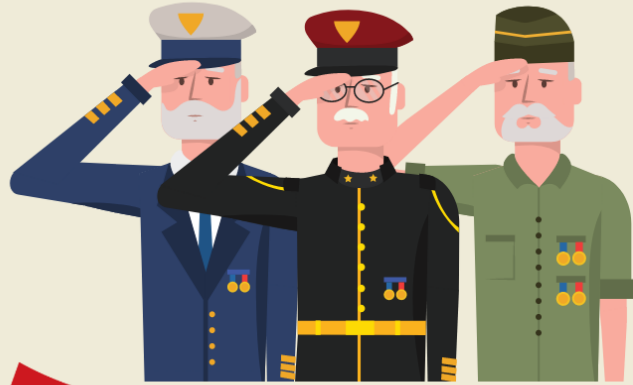
SATURDAY MAY 20, JUNE 17, JULY 15, AUGUST 19,  
SEPTEMBER 16, OCTOBER 21, NOVEMBER 18, DECEMBER 16.

TIME: 8:00 AM - 10 AM

PLACE: TAMPA HOPE  
3704 E. 3RD AVENUE  
TAMPA, FL. 33605



Sign up via SIGNUP GENIUS



## **MEMORIAL DAY REMEMBRANCE**

### **THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE**

Our parish will honor our military personnel who have died while serving in the United States Armed Forces with a Memorial Service and Prayer at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, May 28th. The Veterans/1st Responders Ministry will place several wooden crosses with the emblems of each military service at the entrance of the church to remind us of the sacrifice that these men and women have made for their country.

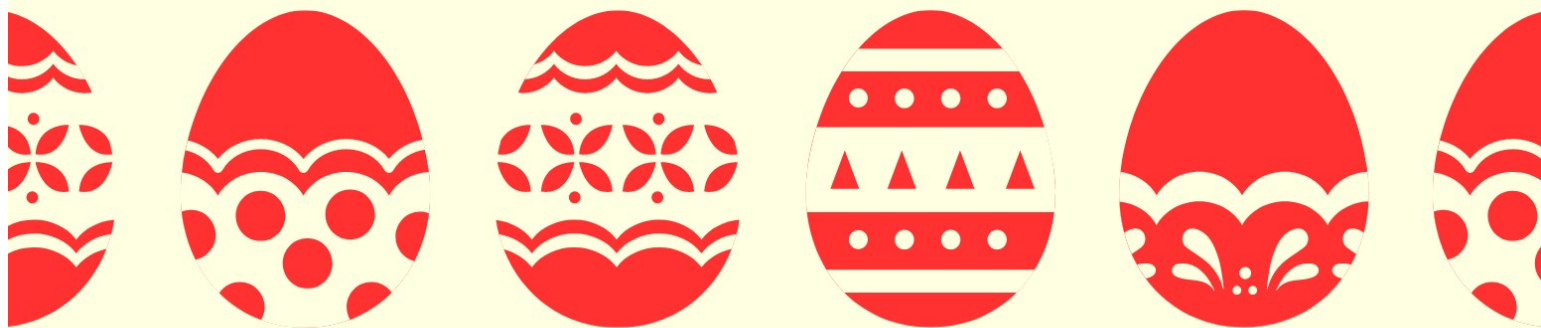
The first national observance of Memorial Day occurred on May 30, 1868. Then known as Decoration Day (for decorating the graves of the fallen with flowers and flags), the holiday was proclaimed by Commander in Chief, Major General, John A. Logan of the Grand Army of the Republic, to honor the Union soldiers who had died in the Civil War. This national observance was preceded by many local ones between the end of the Civil War and Logan's declaration.

Official recognition as a holiday spread among the states, beginning with New York in 1873. By 1890, every Union state had adopted it. World War I and World War II turned it into a day of remembrance for all members of the U.S. military who fought and died in service in 1971. Congress standardized the holiday as "Memorial Day" and changed its observance to the last Monday in May. Many cities and people have claimed to be the first to observe it. However, in 2022, the National Cemetery Administration, a division of the Department of Veterans Affairs, credited Mary Ann Williams with originating the "idea of strewing the graves of Civil War soldiers - Union and Confederate" - with flowers.

Thank you,

Fr. John W. Stefero





# RED EGG DYEING FOR PASCHA

**A BIG THANK YOU to Lisa  
Alsina, Elaine Halkias and  
Sandra Pappas for making 510  
beautiful red eggs.**



**WE'D LOVE TO KEEP THIS  
TRADITION ALIVE, IF YOU ARE  
INTERESTED IN HELPING NEXT  
YEAR, PLEASE LET US KNOW!**



# FIFTY- TWO VERSES -IN- FIFTY- TWO WEEKS

THE BIBLE PROJECT  
BY FR. STAVROS

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

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

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

Below are verses for the month of May. 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](mailto:frstav@gmail.com).

**May 7-13**

**The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.**

**John 5:14**

On the third Sunday after Pascha, we read the story of the healing of the Paralytic. The man who was the Paralytic had been sitting by a pool for 38 years, hoping to be healed. An angel would trouble the water occasionally and whoever entered into the water first was healed. When Jesus encountered the man, He asked him if he wanted to be healed. The man lamented that he had been there for thirty-eight years and no one ever helped him into the pool. Jesus healed the man. Some Bible scholars interpret John 5:14 as one of the saddest verses in the Bible. Because the man "went away" and "told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him." He a) went to those who could harm Jesus and in a sense "betrayed Jesus" to them. And b) and perhaps more significantly, he left the pool where he had been. Perhaps he could have, or should have, stayed to help others get into the water and be healed. When the Lord blesses us, we should be both grateful to Him, and in turn we should bless others. It doesn't appear that the paralytic who was healed did either.

**May 14-20**

**Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.**

On May 14, we celebrate Mothers' Day, and we reserve this day as an occasion to honor our mothers. Honoring mothers (and fathers) is actually one of the Ten Commandments.

Continued...

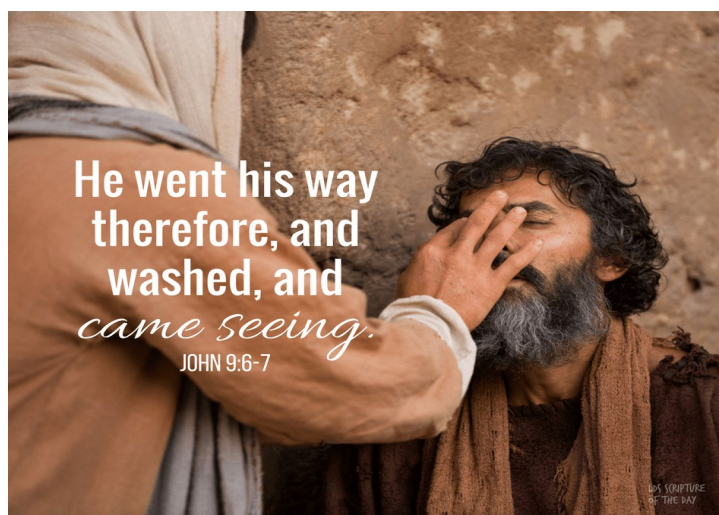


It is also the only one of the commandments which is tied to the length of one's life. When God tells His people to honor father and mother, it is so that their days may be long. This makes sense. Our parents guide us in our formative years, and their advice, specifically about safety, is important to remember. Follow safety rules and one will live long. Ignore safety rules and one could potentially be killed or injured unnecessarily. The honoring of our parents is something that should not be reserved for special days, like Mothers' Day or Fathers' Day—we should respect them and honor them every day. Similarly, parents should honor their children—even when correcting them or teaching them, there is a way to do this that shows dignity and respect at all times.

**May 21-27**

**As He said this, He spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.**

**John 9:6-7**



On the fifth Sunday after Pascha, we read the Gospel account of the healing of the blind man. His healing was made possible by two things. First, by Christ. Christ mixed His material (spittle) and material from creation (clay, which He created) and took the heavenly matter and the earthly matter and placed it on the eyes of the blind man. Jesus, however, told the man that his healing would be the result of going to the pool of Siloam and washing there. Siloam was some distance away from where the man was. The journey would have been an ordeal. The man would have needed to walk quite a distance, over unfamiliar territory. And he wouldn't have been able to count on much help. People thought that blind people were cursed, and people thought interacting with cursed people might rub off negatively on them. Imagine then, the faith that the man would have had, to walk in strange territory by being either derided or ignored. On top of that, Jesus didn't even promise healing. He just told him to go wash.

Yet the man made the journey and was healed. Our healing comes from a combinations of God's grace, our faith in it, and our work.

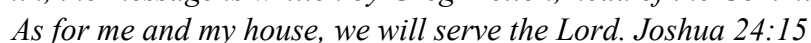
**May 28-June 3**

**Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.**

**John 15:13**

The last weekend of May is reserved for honoring those who have given their lives in the service of our country. Memorial Day is a day to remember the supreme sacrifice that people have made to secure the freedom we enjoy. This week's verse was said by Jesus shortly before His Passion. He was teaching His disciples about the greatest expression of love, and foreshadowing that He would lay down His life for them. There is no greater expression of love than to give the ultimate sacrifice for someone, to die for them. Soldiers who have died in battle have not only laid down their lives for friends, but for total strangers. This is why we honor them for their supreme sacrifice. May God rest the souls of all of our soldiers who have fallen asleep in the defense of our country, our freedom and our world. May He comfort their grieving families as well. And may we appreciate their sacrifice. May we also appreciate those who serve now as soldiers and first responders—they live with the potential of laying down their lives at any time for friends and strangers.









# Community Outreach



Community Outreach ministry serves the church by being visible in the community, working alongside Matthew 25 charity, and spreading goodwill while we serve breakfast to the less fortunate. Our volunteers take time from their Saturday morning once a month to drive to Tampa Hope to serve breakfast and engage in fellowship with our homeless guests. Each one of our guests knows they can count on any one of us for some good eye to eye faithful conversation. Listening to them about their day or an opportunity or ailment or issue they may have and really being a friend in Jesus to them is a great service. We have all had some great conversations with different guests and find sometimes that they end up helping us in an unexpected way. So we not only serve the church with representation in the community but we also serve our guests who are loved by God and in need.

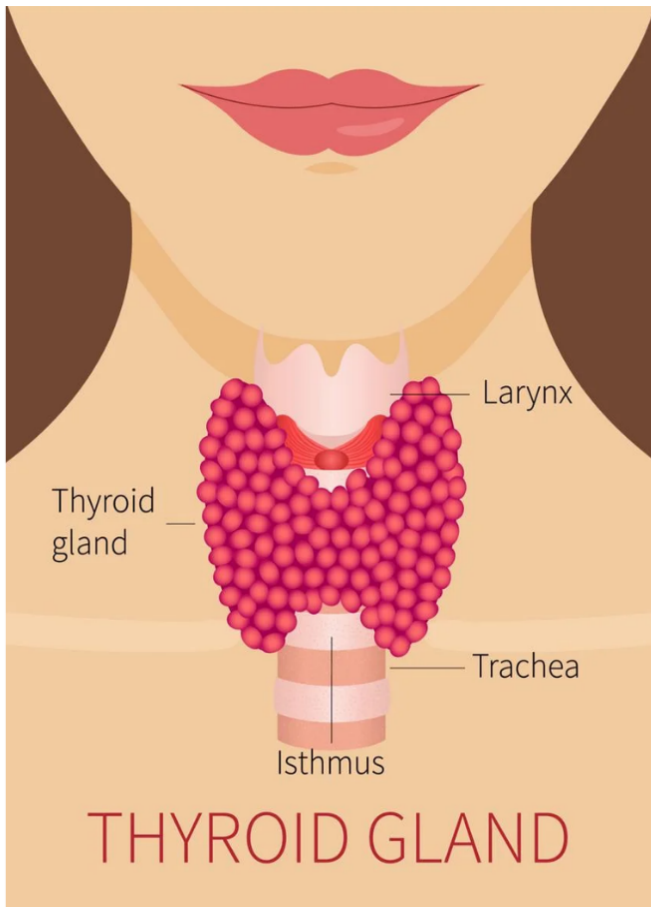
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Greg & Victoria Melton with special recognition to parishioners Jamie Valaes, Margaret Comminos, Marilyn Sandborn, MaryAnn Rose and so many other volunteers from St John GOC who have contributed their time to Community Outreach.

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# NURSING MINISTRY

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## HASHIMOTO'S THYROIDITIS

Symptoms of Hashimoto disease may include any of the following:

- Constipation
- Difficulty concentrating or thinking
- Dry skin
- Enlarged neck or presence of goiter, which may be the only early symptom
- Fatigue
- Hair loss
- Heavy or irregular periods
- Intolerance to cold
- Mild weight gain
- Small or shrunken thyroid gland (late in the disease)

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Hashimoto's thyroiditis is an autoimmune disease, a disorder in which the immune system turns against the body's own tissues. In people with Hashimoto's, the immune system attacks the thyroid. This can lead to hypothyroidism, a condition in which the thyroid does not make enough hormones for the body's needs. Located in the front of your neck, the thyroid gland makes hormones that control metabolism. This includes your heart rate and how quickly your body uses calories from the foods you eat.

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The following factors are associated with an increased risk of Hashimoto's disease:

- Sex. Women are much more likely to get Hashimoto's disease.
- Age. Hashimoto's disease can occur at any age but more commonly occurs during middle age.

Continued



•**Other autoimmune disease.** Having another autoimmune disease — such as rheumatoid arthritis, type 1 diabetes or lupus — increases your risk of developing Hashimoto's disease.

•**Genetics and family history.** You're at higher risk for Hashimoto's disease if others in your family have thyroid disorders or other autoimmune diseases.

•**Pregnancy.** Typical changes in immune function during pregnancy may be a factor in Hashimoto's disease that begins after pregnancy.

•**Excessive iodine intake.** Too much iodine in the diet may function as a trigger among people already at risk for Hashimoto's disease.

•**Radiation exposure.** People exposed to excessive levels of environmental radiation are more prone to Hashimoto's disease.



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## Diagnosis

To determine if hypothyroidism is the cause of your symptoms, your provider will order blood tests that may include the following:

•**TSH test.** Thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) is produced by the pituitary gland. When the pituitary detects low thyroid hormones in the blood, it sends TSH to the thyroid to prompt an increase in thyroid hormone production. High TSH levels in the blood indicate hypothyroidism.

•**T-4 tests.** The main thyroid hormone is thyroxine (T-4). A low blood level of T-4 confirms the findings of a TSH test and indicates the problem is within the thyroid itself.

•**Antibody tests.** Usually in Hashimoto's disease the immune system produces rogue antibodies to a protein (TPO) that plays a role in thyroid production.

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## Treatment

Hypothyroidism associated with Hashimoto's disease is treated with a synthetic hormone called levothyroxine (Levoxyl, Synthroid, others). The synthetic hormone works like the T-4 hormone naturally produced by the thyroid.

The treatment goal is to restore and maintain adequate T-4 hormone levels and improve symptoms of hypothyroidism. You will need to take thyroid replacement medication for the rest of your life and routine thyroid function tests.

# 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  
Sharon Cohonis- Vero Beach, FL

**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 THE BAPTIST  
GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

# INTRODUCTION TO CHANT CLASS

A 13-Week introductory chant class  
offered at St. John's Church

REGISTER FOR CLASSES NOW AT  
[VASILI@STJOHNTPA.ORG](mailto:VASILI@STJOHNTPA.ORG)

All are welcome

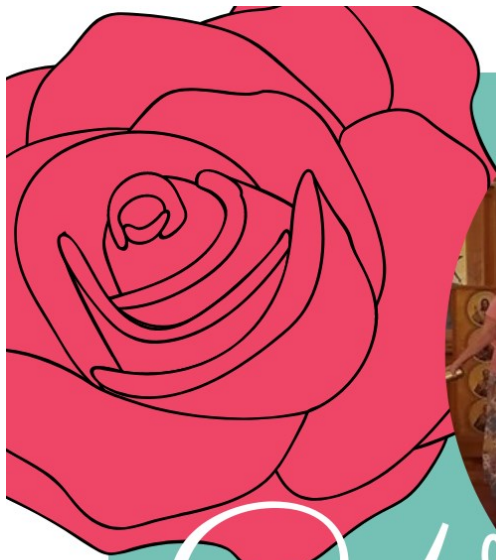
Tuesday's | 6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

First class is Tuesday, May 2

## Three Class Goals

- Being comfortable reading, intoning, and projecting your voice from the  
chanters stand
- Seeing and understanding the services from the perspective of the chanter
- Having the knowledge and ability to chant a Divine Liturgy or Sacrament by  
yourself

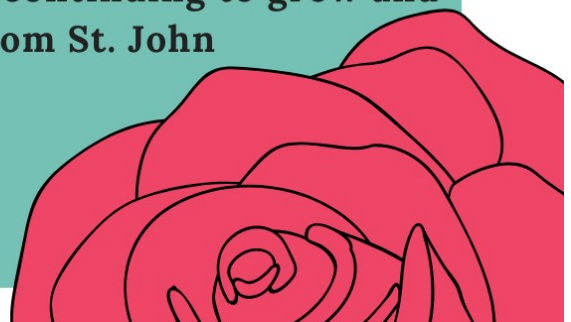




# Women's Retreat

We held our first women's retreat on Saturday, March 25, with SIXTY-TWO women in attendance, from our church and some from the area. The theme was "Behold, I am the Handmaiden of the Lord: Living Life According to His Word." The Philotochos sponsored this event and underwrote the cost of the whole event. It was a great day of worship, fellowship and learning. Below is a testimonial from the day.

The thing I appreciated the most about the women's retreat was getting a proper introduction to our Glorious Lady the Theotokos. As someone who is new to Orthodox faith, coming from an Evangelical background, I feel like I had never been properly introduced to her. She was like someone who sat in the back of the class most of the year and only came forward to speak for a few minutes around Christmas time, but since the women's retreat, I feel like I can begin to understand her in a more profound and meaningful way. I also enjoyed meeting the other women in the church and having an opportunity to fellowship with them! I'm so thankful the Lord led me to the Orthodox faith at St. John's and I'm excited about continuing to grow and mature in the Faith. ~Amy Wenditz, participant from St. John





# Women's Testimony Cont.

When I first saw the information for the women's retreat, I felt a very strong desire to be there, even though as a shy introvert by nature, signing up to attend this retreat by myself was quite outside my comfort level. The retreat was absolutely wonderful and very uplifting. The women at my table were so loving and welcoming, and looking around, I was overwhelmed by seeing so many of my sisters in Christ participating in this experience. There were women of all different ages there, but we were all connected by our faith, as well as by many of our shared roles in life: daughters, sisters, wives, mothers, grandmothers...

I happened to sit next to a woman who I had never met before, but soon found out that she lives in the neighboring town to me. I was very excited about that because we are both quite a distance from the church (it takes me 40 minutes without traffic), and also, because we are both going through similar struggles in our lives. Since the retreat, we have car pooled to church, shared a meal, and found support in each other!

During the retreat, it was very enlightening to realize that we serve daily, not just through volunteering through the church, but also through our roles as mothers, wives, and even through our jobs. Since then, I have been even more purposeful to serve others in love as I go through my day and through my job. I was also struck by how critical the Virgin Mary's submission to the Lord and acceptance to be part of His plan for our salvation truly was, especially coming from a teenager! Although I understood this before, quietly focusing on the icon in Church really highlighted how incredible this submission was, as well as, how enormous Panagia's faith and trust in God was. Since the retreat, looking up to the Theotokos as the ultimate role model, I am very cognizant and more purposeful to submit to God as his handmaiden, even though it is a struggle. ~Maria Sofos Demos, Women's retreat Participant



THANK YOU TO ALL THE WOMEN WHO ATTENDED





# SUNDAY SCHOOL

5TH GRADE STUDENTS MADE THEIR COMMUNION CLOTH SET TO GO OVER THEIR CHALICE AND PATEN THAT THEY MADE EARLIER.







H O L Y W E E K



M A I D E N S

P A L M   S U N D A Y  
N I G H T



H O L Y  
M O N D A Y



H O L Y  
T U E S D A Y



G O O D   F R I D A Y  
M Y R R H   B E A R E R S





**AHEPA LYCURGUS CHAPTER 12**  
**DAUGHTERS OF PENELOPE ALCMAEON CHAPTER 167**  
**SONS OF PERICLES CHAPTER 39**  
**MAIDS OF ATHENA NIKKI CHAPTER 39**  
**MAY 2023**

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**ANNOUNCING THE 2023 AHEPA FAMILY OF TAMPA SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**  
**SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

The **AHEPA FAMILY of TAMPA SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM** is intended to promote, encourage, and advance education at the high school, college, university, and graduate school level. Scholarships in the amount of \$500 or higher will be awarded based on the funds available in the AHEPA/DOP Scholarship account for the current year.

**ELIGIBILITY**

Eligible applicants must demonstrate that:

1. They are currently seniors in high school and have been accepted at an accredited college or university as degree seeking students for an associate or bachelor's degree. Those not accepted at an institution may be eligible to receive an award by providing evidence of acceptance prior to the award being granted.
2. They are currently enrolled in an accredited college or university seeking an associate, bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree.
3. They are in good academic standing.
4. They have no criminal record.
5. The applicant OR his/her parent(s) or guardian(s) are stewards in good standing at St. John's Greek Orthodox Church (Tampa, Florida) and are current members in good standing of the AHEPA/DOP Tampa chapters.

**APPLICATIONS**

Applications are available via email from AHEPA President Thomas Sakaris, [tomsak1234@gmail.com](mailto:tomsak1234@gmail.com) or DOP President Elena Paras Ketchum at [eketchum@srbp.com](mailto:eketchum@srbp.com).

**FILING THE APPLICATION**

All applications must be filed by mail and postmarked no later than May 31st, 2023.  
Please review the application for more information.

**JOIN TODAY – BECOME A MEMBER OF AHEPA OR THE  
DAUGHTERS OF PENELOPE**





**SUNDAY, APRIL 16**

**A BIG THANK YOU OUR  
PITMASTERS JOHN ZELATIS  
AND MIKE PALIOS!**

**A WARM THANK YOU TO ALL OUR  
PARISHIONERS WHO HELPED. WE  
COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT  
YOU!**





# GREEK INDEPENDANCE DAY PROGRAM



On Sunday, March 26, we had our annual Greek Independence Day Luncheon and program. Special thanks to Vasili, our pastoral assistant, for organizing the day, to the Parish Council for providing the lunch and the children and adult students of our two Greek school programs for the inspiring program.







*Congratulations to*

20  23

**IF YOU HAVE A STUDENT WHO IS GRADUATING, PLEASE EMAIL ALL INFORMATION TO THE CHURCH OFFICE BY MONDAY, MAY 15 SO WE CAN INCLUDE GRADUATES IN THE JUNE/JULY ISSUE OF THE MESSENGER/ PLEASE PROVIDE: NAME AND PICTURE OF THE GRADUATE, THE INSTITUTION GRADUATING FROM, ANY DEGREE, IN THE CASE OF A COLLEGE GRADUATE, AND WHAT COLLEGE THE PERSON PLANS TO ATTEND, IN THE CASE OF THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE.**

**PLEASE EMAIL KIM (ADMIN) WITH THE ABOVE INFORMATION:  
KIM@STJOHNTPA.ORG**



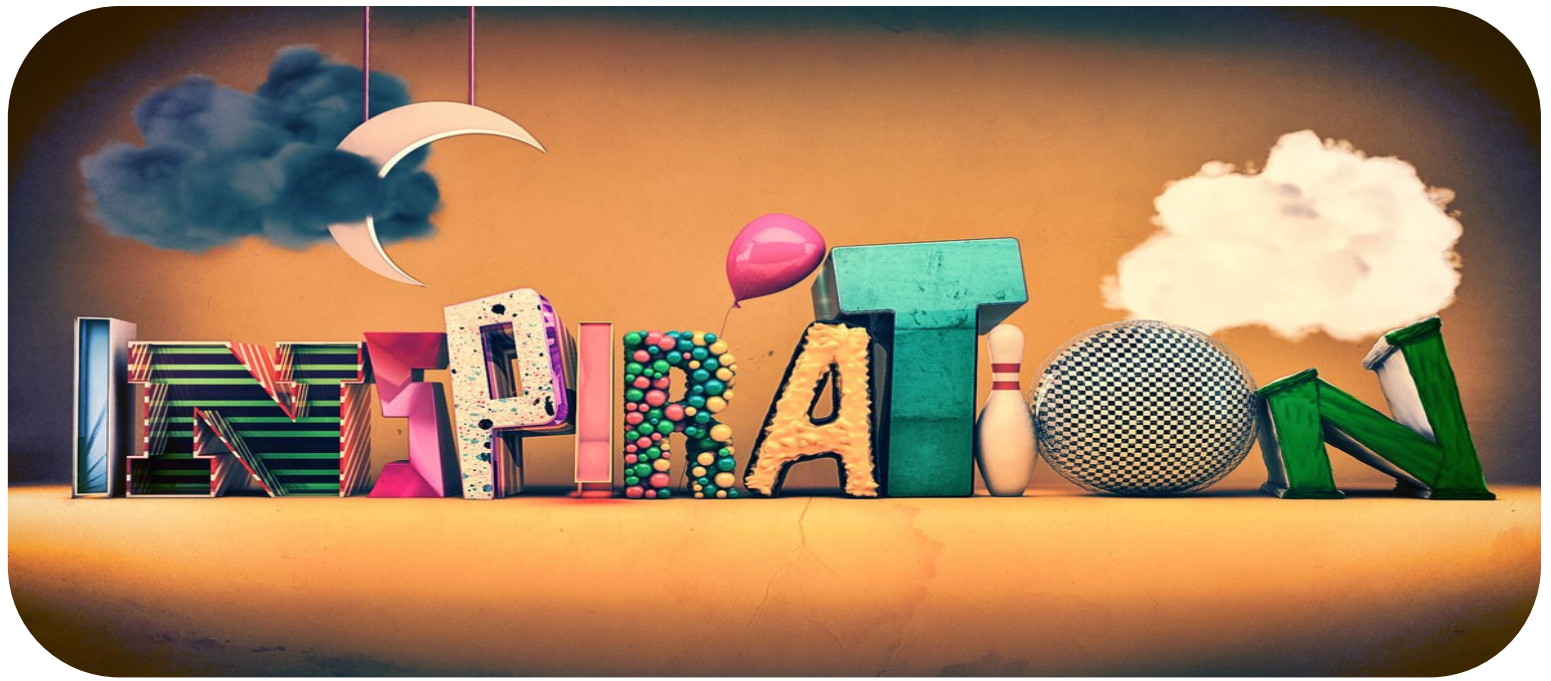
*our Graduates!*

## Adult Dance Group

“Everyone grab your dancing shoes and brush off your costumes! The adult dance group Panigyri will be starting Greek dance practice on Wednesday May 10th at 7pm in the church hall. Pls wear dance shoes or sneakers and comfortable clothes for dancing. This will be for fun the first few monthly practices and then we will start gearing up in August for our festival with weekly practices every Wednesday night until the festival. Thereafter we will create line-ups for those that commit to

performing several times each day for the festival. The next practice thereafter will be Wednesday June 14th; Wednesday July 12th; and then every Wednesday in August. All at 7pm.





The enemy thought he had taken “everything” from Job. But Job’s everything was God.  
You know you are truly at peace with who you are when you have lost the need for other people to accept it.

---

You work 8 hours to live 4. You work 6 days to enjoy 1. You work 8 hours to eat in 15 minutes. You work 8 hours to sleep 5. You work all year just to take a week or two vacation. You work all your life to retire in old age, and contemplate only your last breaths. Eventually you realize that life is nothing but a parody of yourself practicing for your own oblivion. We have become so accustomed to material and social slavery that we no longer see the chains. Life is a short journey, live it! Collect memories, not material things!

---

Ships don’t sink because of the waters that surround them but because of the waters that enter into them. Therefore, do not let what surrounds you fill your soul and drag you down. ~Patriarch Pavle of Serbia  
There is a difference between interest and commitment. When you’re interested in something you do it only when it’s convenient. When you are committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results. ~Kenneth Blanchard

If you put 100 black ants and 100 red ants in a jar, nothing will happen. But if you shake the jar hard, the ants will start killing each other. The red ants will consider black ants their enemies, and the black ants will consider the red ants their enemies. The real enemy is the one who shakes the jar. The same thing happens in human society. So before we attach each other, we should think about who is shaking the jar.

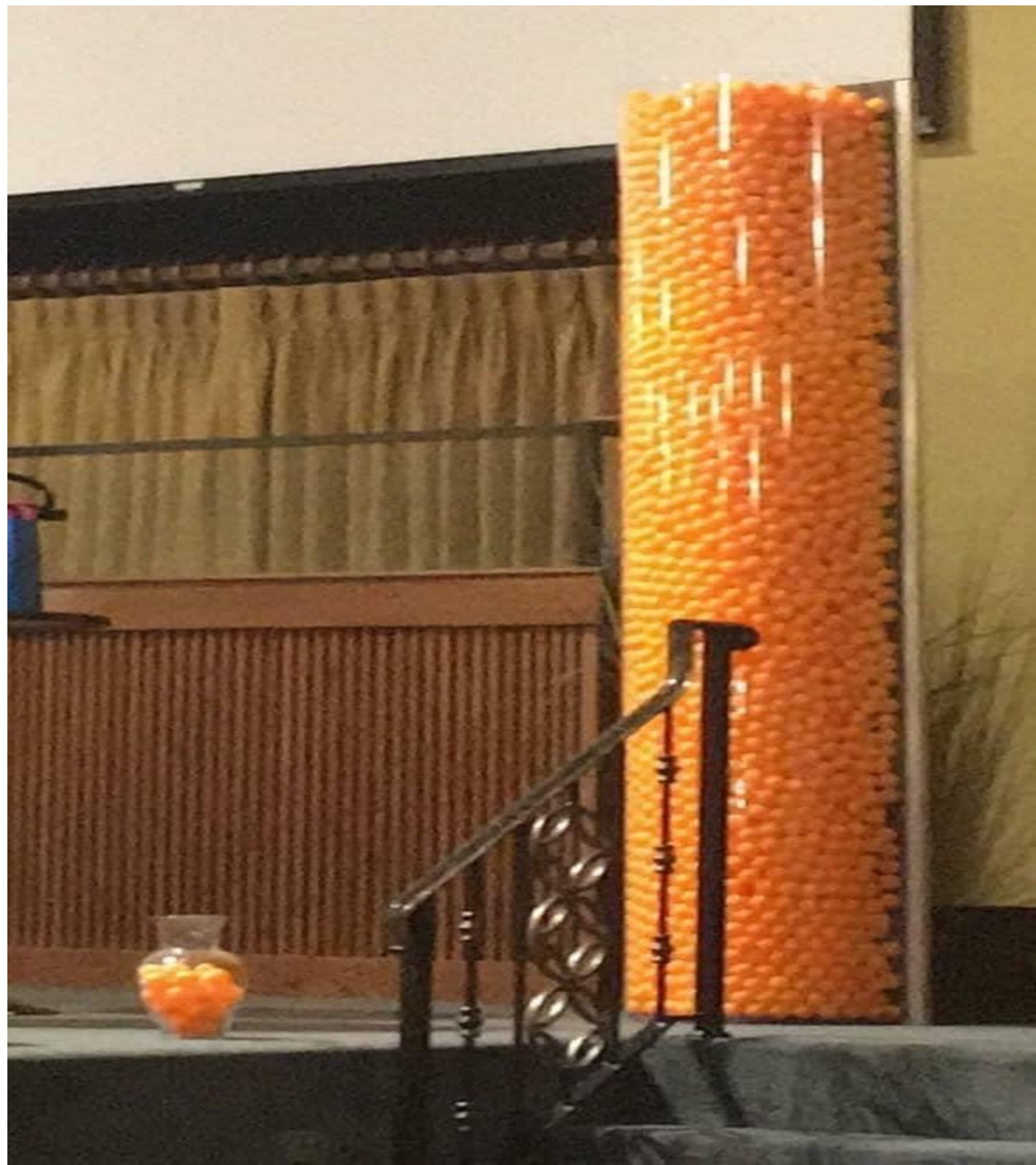
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A man went to church. He forgot to switch off and his phone rang in the church accidentally during prayer. The pastor scolded him. The worshippers admonished him after prayers for interrupting the service. His wife kept on lecturing him on his carelessness all the way home. One could see the shame, embarrassment and humiliation on his face. After all this, he never stepped foot in the church again. AND  
That evening, he went to a bar. He was still nervous and trembling. He spilled his drink on the table by accident. The waiter apologized and gave him a napkin to clean himself. The janitor mopped the floor. The female manager offered him a complimentary drink. She also gave him a huge hug and a peck while saying, “Don’t worry man. Who doesn’t make mistakes?” He has not stopped going to that bar since then.

Lesson: Sometimes our attitude as believers drives souls to hell. You can make a difference by how you treat people especially when they make mistakes.

We’re at a point in Christianity where people don’t care if you can back it up with Bible. Their feelings, desires and emotions override what scripture says. They don’t follow Christ, they follow emotions.





# 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



# 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 Stewardship 2023

Here is where we are so far in 2023- April 1, 2023	4/1/2023	3/10/2023	Change
Total pledged and Unpledged Collected	\$405,421	\$378,204	\$27,217
Average of Pledged & Unpledged	\$1,668	\$1,666	\$2.00
Median of Pledged & Unpledged	\$800	\$800	---
Total Number of Families & Individuals Giving	243	234	9

We hope to surpass last year's total of 363 Families & Individuals.

There are still 147 families and individuals who have not Pledged for 2023.

Our Stewardship provides the financial foundation for every aspect of our Ministry offerings. If you participate in any of them.

Please consider mailing your forms to the office or go online at [stjohntpa.org](http://stjohntpa.org)

If you any questions regarding Stewardship please call or text George Mitseas at 813-748-1220. **We Are Counting on Everyone !**

### Parish Registry

**Baptism**-Penelope Lynn Harvie, daughter of Evan and Brittany Harvie, was baptized on Sunday, March 26. Alexander Harvie was the Godparent. Na Sas Zisi!

**Adult Baptism**-Zachary Aaron (John) Rubin was baptized on Friday, March 31. Markos and Ekaterini Mangarides were the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

**Emergency Baptism**-Elena Reilly, daughter of Thomas and Anna Maria (Cocca) Reilly, was baptized in an emergency baptism at Tampa General Hospital on Saturday, April 15, the same day she was born.

**Double Chrismation**-Ausman Enrique (Moses) and Sarah Marie Rodriguez were Chrismated on Sunday, March 19. Aris Rogers was the Sponsor for Enrique and Maria Xenick was the Sponsor for Sarah. Congratulations!

**Chrismation**-Amy Norman Wenditz was Chrismated on Wednesday, March 29. Marcelle Triantafilou was the sponsor.

Congratulations!

## 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*





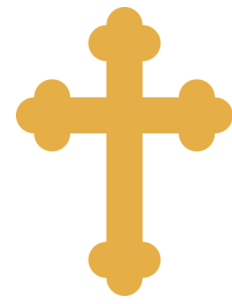
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## Fr. Stavros Participates in “Be Attentive” Program at Holy Cross School of Theology

Fr. Stavros was asked to participate in the “Be Attentive” program at Holy Cross School of Theology in Brookline, MA, from March 16-18. This program is designed to help men discern a priestly calling. The Orthodox church nationwide is in dire need for priests, but is looking for the right people to be ordained. Six priests from around the country offered a three day seminar to 21 prospective seminarian candidates. Fr. Stavros will be participating in future seminars to help fill a desperate need for priests.

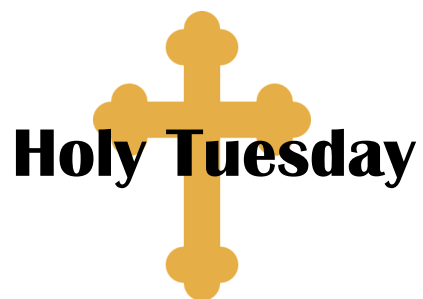
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## Holy Monday

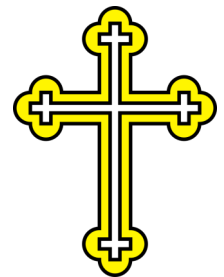
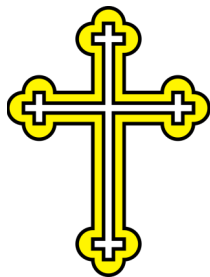


## Holy Wednesday Afternoon



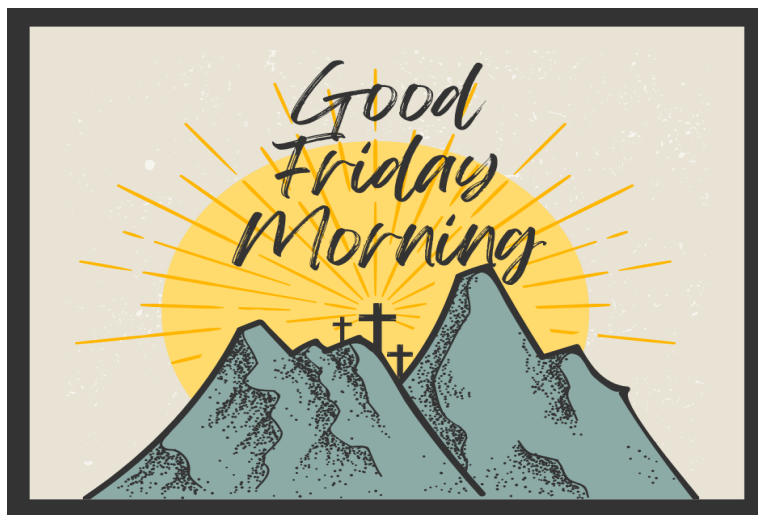


# Holy Wednesday -Holy Unction

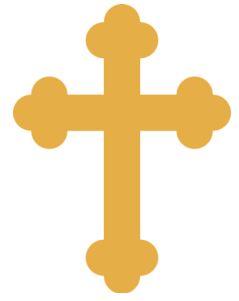




# Holy Thursday













Good  
Friday  
Afternoon  
2023





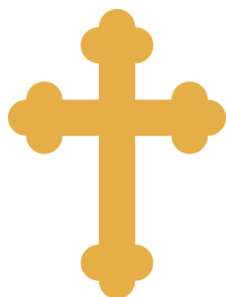


**Good**  
Friday Evening  
2023



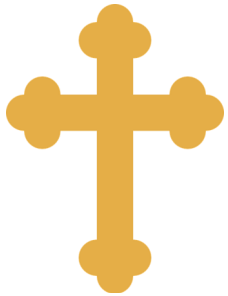


# Holy Saturday



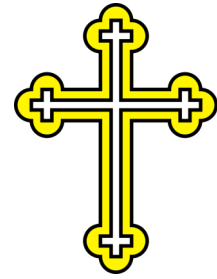


# Anastasis

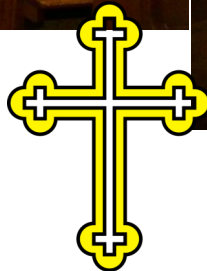




# Anastasis









St. John  
the  
Baptist

# Follow Us on Social Media



Let's Get Connected for Our Latest News & Updates



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@<https://www.facebook.com/StJohnGOCTampa/>



on Instagram @stjohntpa



[stjohntpa.org](http://stjohntpa.org)

2418 W. Swann Avenue  
Tampa, FL 33609

(813)876-8830



◀ Apr 2023	May 2023					Jun 2023 ▶
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	<b>1</b> Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	<b>2</b> Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Veteran's First Responders 6:30 p.m.  Chant Class 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b> Adult Greek School	<b>5 St. Irene</b> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. JOY Tween's—Movie night	<b>6</b> Young at Heart
<b>7 Sunday of the Paralytic</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Philoptochos General meeting-Zaharias Room AHEPA/Daughter's GOYA 5:00 p.m.	<b>8 St. John the Theologian/St. Arsenios</b> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	<b>9</b> Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Meeting of Ministry Heads 6:30 p.m.  Chant Class 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.	<b>10 Mid-Pentecost</b> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Choir Practice	<b>11</b> Adult Greek School Young adult Discussion	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>14 Sunday of the Samaritan Woman</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	<b>15 St. Pachomios-Fr. Stavros 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ordination</b> Orthros 5:00 p.m. Liturgy 6:00 p.m.	<b>16</b> Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.  Chant Class 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.	<b>17</b> Paraklesis 6:00 p.m. Choir Practice	<b>18</b> Adult Greek School	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b> Community Outreach
<b>21 Sunday of Blind Man/Sts. Constantine and Helen</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Youth Sunday Parea Dance Practice Last Day of Sunday School End of the year party Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	<b>22</b> Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.  Chant Class 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.	<b>23 Leave-Taking of Pascha</b> Orthros 5:00 p.m. Liturgy 6:00 p.m.	<b>24</b> Choir Practice	<b>25 Ascension</b> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Adult Greek School	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>28 Sunday of the Holy Fathers of 1<sup>st</sup> Ecumenical Council</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Veterans (Memorial)	<b>29</b> Memorial Day	<b>30</b> Bible Study 6:30 p.m.  Chant Class 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.	<b>31</b> Choir Practice			

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH  
2418 W. SWANN AVENUE  
TAMPA, FL 33609-4712  
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**As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before Thy face, who shall prepare thy way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight -- " Mark 2:3**