



# St. John the Baptist

## Greek Orthodox Church

# THE MESSENGER

APRIL 2024



Palm Sunday

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.

*(During GREAT LENT SUNDAY SERVICES begin at 9:45 AM)*

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Parish Priest</b><br>Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis<br>813-876-8830 (O)<br>firstav@gmail.com  | <b>Buildings &amp; Grounds</b><br>Euripides Panos    813-352-3972   | <b>Men's Fellowship</b><br>Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis<br>813-394-1038       |
| <b>Retired Priest in Residence</b><br>Rev. Fr. Stratton Dorozenski    813-876-8830 (O)  | <b>Choir</b><br>Tara Swartzbaugh, Director    813-313-0439<br>Ruth Losovitz, Organist    727-688-2782   | <b>Parish Nursing Ministry</b><br>Marcelle Triantafilou    612-396-5026             |
| <b>Retired Priest in Residence</b><br>Rev. Fr. John Stefero    813-876-8830 (O)<br>678-637-4425 (C)<br>jwstefero50@hotmail.com  | <b>College Student Program</b><br>Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis    414-254-5134   | <b>Oratorical Festival</b><br>Peggy Bradshaw    727-244-1374                        |
| <b>Parish Council</b><br>John Zelatis, President    813-727-2271<br>Euripides Panos, Vice President    813-352-3972<br>Marilyn Sandborn, Secretary    813-760-6289<br>Mike Xenick, Treasurer    813-340-8737<br>George Ameres    941-720-3494<br>Peggy George    813-727-5587<br>Peter George    781-910-9971<br>Amin Hanhan    813-846-2957<br>Suzanne Pileggi    813-244-5855<br>Alexis Scarfogliero    813-892-1599<br>Marcelle Triantafilou    612-396-5026 | <b>Community Outreach</b><br>Greg Melton    813-967-2074  | <b>Photography Ministry</b><br>Karina Findlay    813-476-9632                       |
| <b>Office Staff</b><br>Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper<br>debbie@stjohntpa.org    813-443-4899 (fax)  | <b>Connect Through Christ -<br/>Special Needs Ministry for Children</b><br>Dante and Lindsey Skourellos    813-765-9534   | <b>Philoptochos</b><br>Katherine Sakkis    813-309-1073                             |
| <b>Adopt a College Student</b><br>Kathy Kaburis    813-240-6513   | <b>Dance Groups</b><br>H XAPA ΜΑΣ, Alexandra De Maio<br>813-340-9668<br>Maraquet Edquid    813-422-8963<br>IIAPEA, Marina Choundas    813-877-6136<br>IIANHI'YPI, Alexandra De Maio<br>813-340-9668 | <b>Stewardship</b><br>Chris Kyrus    757-672-1920<br>George Mitseas    813-748-1220 |
| <b>Adult Greek School</b><br>Magda Myer    813-523-5771   | <b>Daughters of Penelope</b><br>Elena Paras Ketchum    813-229-0144   | <b>Sunday School</b><br>Vickie Peckham    813-758-3102                              |
| <b>AHEPA</b><br>Thomas Sakaris, President    201-819-2319   | <b>Festival</b><br>Mike Xenick    813-340-8737  | <b>Usher</b><br>Pete Trakas    813-505-2193   |
| <b>Altar Angels</b><br>Kalliope Chagaris    813-789-4134  | <b>Finance Committee</b><br>Gary Ward    813-846-3898   | <b>Veterans/1st Responders</b><br>Fr. John Stefero    813-876-8830                  |
| <b>Altar Boys</b><br>Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis    813-394-1038  | <b>Food Pantry</b><br>Sandra Pappas    813-785-3747   | <b>Website / Social Media / APP<br/>VOLUNTEER NEEDED!</b>                           |
| <b>Bookstore</b><br>Presbyteria Denise Stefero    678-464-4833  | <b>Gasparilla Parking</b><br>Volunteer Needed   | <b>Welcoming Ministry</b><br>Maria Xenick    813-765-3587                           |
| <b>Bible Study-Tuesday Night</b><br>Fr. John Stefero    678-637-4425  | <b>GOYA</b><br>Michael & Bessie Palios    813-523-0346  | <b>Women's Bible Study</b><br>Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis<br>813-394-1038    |
|   | <b>Hope/Joy</b><br>George & Zackie Ameres    813-245-3813   | <b>Young Adult</b><br>Aris Rogers    813-309-5525                                   |
|   | <b>Joy Tweens</b><br>Maraquet Edquid    813-422-8963  | <b>Young at Heart</b><br>Dora Morgan    813-613-3738                                |
|   | <b>Junior Olympics</b><br>Dwight Forde    561-310-5034  | <b>Youth Protection</b><br>Suzanne Pileggi    813-244-5855                          |
|   |   | <b>12 Disciples</b> <b>Volunteer Needed</b>   |

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

# Fr. Stavros' Message

*Forgiveness - WHEN SOMEBODY you've wronged forgives you, you're spared the dull and self-diminishing throb of a guilty conscience.*

*When you forgive somebody who has wronged you, you're spared the dismal corrosion of bitterness and wounded pride.*

*For both parties, forgiveness means the freedom again to be at peace inside their own skins and to be glad in each other's presence.*

*Frederick Buechner*

The first words of Jesus from the Cross, after being tortured for hours, beaten within an inch of His life, rejected by His chosen people, abandoned by His disciples, unjustly condemned and shunned by the world He created, His first words were "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

The Lord's Prayer, which is the prayer we offer most often, says "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." (Matthew 6:12)

Jesus speaks of forgiveness in Matthew 6:14-15, when He says "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

During Holy Week, we will approach to receive Holy Communion. We will approach to be anointed with Holy Unction for the healing of soul and body. We will approach to venerate the Lord as He hangs on the cross. We will approach to receive the Light of the Resurrected Christ on Pascha. And these things will be rendered rather meaningless if we approach with a hardened heart that cannot forgive, or with pride that sees no need for forgiveness, either to offer it, or to accept it.

Here is a beautiful quote from Max Lucado, from his book *Unshakable Hope*. He writes "God resists the proud because the proud resist God. Arrogance stiffens the knee so it will not kneel, hardens the heart so it will not admit to sin. The heart of pride never confesses, never repents, never asks for forgiveness. Pride is the hidden reef that shipwrecks the soul."

The journey to Holy Week began in late February, on the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, when we saw how God accepted the prayer of humility by the Publican, rather than the prayer of self-congratulations and exaltation of the Pharisee.

The Prodigal Son contrasted the infinite mercy of the Father who forgave His younger son who had wasted everything, with the older son who could find no room for forgiveness and mercy.

Forgiveness was the theme of the Sunday before Great Lent, where we were encouraged to forgive and to ask for forgiveness, to unburden our souls and lighten our hearts.

The journey continues as we mark the remaining Sundays of Great Lent. The Sunday of the Cross reminds us that if we are to come after Christ, then we must deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow Him (Mark 8:34) However, we must carry our cross the way He carried His. Which means that in the midst of disappointment, we must find the grace to forgive.

The fourth Sunday of Lent commemorates St John of the Ladder, who authored the book "The Ladder of Divine Ascent," where he outlines specific steps to take on our journey to salvation. To ascend the heights of heaven requires us to renounce the things of earth, including anger and disappointment.

The fifth Sunday of Lent commemorates St. Mary of Egypt, whose life had fallen so far off God's path that a force prohibited her from entering into the temple to worship. She turned her life around with repentance and now we are honoring her as a saint, proving that it is never too late, when we come to God with sincere humility and a desire to repent.

Which brings us to the Holy Week journey, which will pass by the foot of the Cross, where we will again sing in wonder how the one "who suspended the earth amidst the waters" was hung upon the Cross, crowned with thorns, beaten, mocked and derided. We will again hear the words of forgiveness that Christ imparted to all creation—they know not what they are doing. We will again remember the capacity of Christ to redeem a thief who figured it out in His last breath. We will again stand with the centurion and wonder why we are killing the Son of God. And finally we will arrive with the women at the tomb. They came in fear of the Romans. Some of us will come in fear of ourselves, our mortality, our sins. The journey of Great Lent is about forgiveness and repentance, being loosed of failure and recommitting to Christ. Indeed the journey will feel empty if we cannot forgive others, or ask forgiveness from God and from others, and if we are unwilling to make any steps of repentance, change, that will point us closer to Him.

There is still ample time to come to confession before Pascha. There is still ample time to forgive someone. There is still ample time to reclaim joy at the empty. But it starts with our own humility, to bend the knee and soften the heart, and break free of the reefs that shipwreck our souls.

+Fr. Stavros



# The Journey of Holy Week: Form Versus Substance, Choosing Your Services

*This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance forever.*

*Exodus 12:14*

No other Christian denomination can compare its liturgical “form” to that of the Orthodox Church. That is because a) We have the most complete set of worship services (comments below); b) The worship services are old—most of them date to the early centuries of Christianity, so they are historical and timeless, rather than modern; and c) they are done the same way the world over, so there is consistency.

Most people’s worship experience is restricted to the weekly celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Yet, there are MANY other worship services in the liturgical anthology of the church—such as Orthros, Vespers, Compline, Akathist, and Paraklesis, in addition to the Divine Liturgy. Our worship is restricted in part because it is not possible for many of us who work to attend services outside of Sundays. And most simply live too far away from the church to come several times a week. It is also impossible for a parish with only one full time priest, as most Orthodox churches in this country have, to offer a “full” array of services. It would be unrealistic to offer daily Orthros (morning service) and Vespers (evening service) and expect people to come to these services. So by and large they are not offered.

During Lent and especially during Holy Week, a more complete calendar of services is kept. During Lent, Sunday Liturgy is supplemented with the service of the Compline on Monday evenings, Pre-Sanctified Liturgy on Wednesday evenings and Salutations/Akathist services on Friday evenings. And during Holy Week, the liturgical calendar reaches a climax as the church offers services EVERY morning and evening for a week. This is the church at its best, because we are first and foremost a praying church, and we are at our best when the church is in an almost constant state of prayer and worship.

## *Holy Week-You Are There*

I’ve often looked at Holy Week as a lengthy play. It has several scenes, a plot that runs all the way through, times of conflict and times of reflection, times of sorrow and times of triumph. The road is long but the reward is great. I’ve had many non-Orthodox friends who have never been to church in between Palm Sunday and Pascha. And there are many Orthodox who don’t make much of the journey in between either. But the reward of the journey, the glory of the Resurrection, is found in making the Holy Week journey in as complete a way as possible. As one of our prayers says, “Through the cross, joy has come to all the world.” And there isn’t much joy to be had at the Resurrection, if one hasn’t endured the pain of the crucifixion.

In the Holy Week journey, you are there—each event of the week is commemorated in scripture, in hymn and in action. On Holy Wednesday, for example, we pray for healing, we chant about healing, and then we approach to be anointed for physical and spiritual healing. On Holy Thursday, we read about the Passion of Christ, we chant hymns about it, and we experience the procession of the Crucified Christ. This puts us back 2,000 years ago to Jerusalem. We feel the darkness and fear in the troubled city, we stand watch over the crucifixion, we make the midnight journey with the women to the empty tomb and we return to the church to proclaim the good news that Christ is risen from the dead.

What does this do for us? It reminds us what it is we believe. This is a one-week tutorial if you will on why the Crucifixion and Resurrection are important for our lives. It reaffirms our faith—it is a “shot in the arm” so to speak of enthusiasm for being a Christian, because the week ends on a positive note, and because the journey is shared with pilgrims like us. It provides a time of new beginnings—as we will sing on Pascha, “Let all things be forgiven in the Resurrection.”

## The Scenes of Holy Week

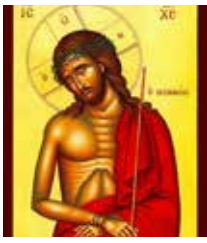
### Scene One—The Triumphal Entry

#### **Days: Saturday of Lazarus-Palm Sunday Morning**

*These two days provide a respite from the austerity and sadness of Great Lent. The Saturday of Lazarus commemorates the miracle of Jesus raising His friend Lazarus from the dead. And it is a foreshadowing of the general resurrection of the dead that is possible for all through Christ’s Resurrection. Palm Sunday commemorates the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Jesus enters the city on a donkey and is met by thousands of people who wave palm branches and sing praises to him.*



**Observations:** *The colors for these two days are lighter, generally white on Saturday of Lazarus because of this is a Resurrectional liturgy and green on Palm Sunday. The Divine Liturgy both days is that of St. John Chrysostom. Both days are joyful in tone and nature.*



## **Scene Two—The Early Days of Holy Week—the Final Teachings/Plotting the Betrayal**

### **Days: Palm Sunday evening through Holy Wednesday morning**

*As day changes to night on Palm Sunday, the joy of the morning fades to reflective sadness on what lies ahead. The journey of the next three days is a mixture of Christ telling His followers of the end times and to remain vigilant and narrative of the Chief Priests and the plot against Christ.*

**Observations:** *The Icon of the Nymphios/Bridegroom, is carried in procession on Sunday evening and remains in the middle of the church sanctuary until after the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy on Wednesday morning. The Bridegroom service is held on Palm Sunday, Holy Monday and Holy Tuesday evenings with the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy being held on Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday and Holy Wednesday mornings. The colors worn at these services are traditionally purple and black. The lights are kept dim for these services.*

## **Scene Three—The Upper Room**

### **Days: Holy Wednesday Evening-Holy Thursday morning**

*The theme now changes to one of healing, as we commemorate the washing of the feet and the institution of the Holy Eucharist. On Holy Wednesday evening, we celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Unction and on Holy Thursday morning, the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great.*

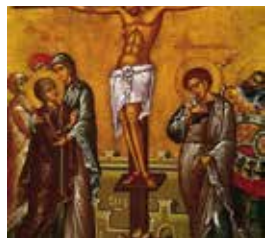
**Observations:** *The Icon of the Last Supper is displayed at both services. Traditionally crimson or deep red is worn on Holy Thursday, symbolizing the blood of Christ instituted in the New Covenant of Holy Communion and shed for the life and salvation of the world on the Cross. The Divine Liturgy of Holy Thursday morning has a joyful tone to it.*



## **Scene Four—The Passion and Death of Christ**

### **Days: Holy Thursday evening, Good Friday morning and Good Friday afternoon**

*The journey of Holy Week now goes into high gear. We move from the upper room, to the Garden of Gethsemane, to the Betrayal, the Torture, the Trial, the road to Golgotha, the Crucifixion, Death and Burial of the Lord. Between these three services, 17 Gospel passages are read, almost half of the Holy Week total. The first Gospel on Holy Thursday evening is the long discourse and High Priestly Prayer of Christ and is a beautiful passage on love and friendship. The Procession of the Crucified Christ occurs after the fifth Gospel. The faithful have an opportunity to kneel and pray before the Cross. The service of the Hours on Good Friday morning is traditionally not well attended, which almost seems appropriate. Very few followers hung on to witness the Crucifixion of the Lord. Most fled to their homes. The service of the Hours has little fanfare or pageantry, but is a quiet vigil watching over the Lord on the Cross. The Vespers of the Descent of the Cross is a good service to attend particularly if you cannot attend the other two. It summarizes the events of the previous two services adding the burial of Christ in the tomb. The body of Christ is removed from the cross and wrapped in a white linen sheet. It is entombed on the altar table for the remainder of the service and is not put back up on the cross until the Ascension forty days after Pascha.*



**Observations:** *The vestments worn at these services are purple and black. Good Friday is the only day of the year when no Divine Liturgy can be held. Also no funeral services can be done on Good Friday—the only funeral is that of the Lord. The Icon displayed is the Icon of the Crucifixion.*

## **Scene Five—The Lamentations**

### **Day: Good Friday Evening**

*This is a service of transition between the sadness of Holy Thursday and the joy of the Resurrection. The color worn at this service is traditionally gold or red. The lights are turned up again for the first time since Palm Sunday. This service is highlighted by the singing of the Lamentations and the procession around the outside of the church with the tomb of the Lord. In terms of the Holy Week narrative, however, very little is covered. The Gospel is only 4 verses long and is a repeat of the 12th Gospel of Holy Thursday night. The Prophecy of Ezekiel and the Epistle reading from the book of Corinthians are important scriptural references. The icon displayed for this service is the icon of the Extreme Humility. It shows Christ going into the tomb with the cross in the background. Many people flock to the Good Friday service for the “pageantry”—the Lamentations, the Procession, etc. In my opinion, while this is one of my favorite services in Holy Week to celebrate, it is not one of the most important. Certainly Holy Thursday evening, the Gospel narratives of the Passion and the Procession of the Crucified Christ rank of higher importance. So, while I encourage you to attend as many services of the week as possible, I would actually consider this service not as important as many others.*





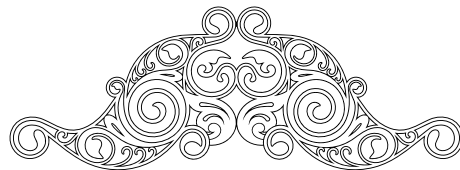
## **Scene Six—The Empty Tomb**

**Days: Holy Saturday Morning-Holy Saturday Evening-Easter Sunday**

*There are two Paschal Liturgies, that is two liturgies that commemorate the Resurrection of Christ. In the ancient church, there was an all-night vigil commemorating the Resurrection with the Vespers and Liturgy of St. Basil being held in the evening hours of Holy Saturday, the Resurrection Service at midnight, and the Orthros and Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom being held on Sunday morning. In recent centuries, this has been changed. The Resurrection service is still held at midnight. The Orthros and Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom follow immediately, from 12:30-2:00 a.m. And the Vespers and Liturgy of St. Basil have been transposed to Holy Saturday morning. Thus, we proclaim the Resurrection with “Arise o God,” “Anasta o Theos,” from the morning of Holy Saturday. The Holy Saturday morning Liturgy commemorates the first announcement of the Resurrection to those who were in Hades. Jesus Christ descended into Hades and bestowed eternal life to those who had been held captive there. The Resurrection Service and the Liturgy which follows commemorate the Resurrection of Christ from the dead.*

**Observations:** *The color for Pascha traditionally is White. On Holy Saturday morning, bay leaves are scattered throughout the church as a sign of Christ’s victory over Hades and death. Prophecies foretelling the Resurrection are read, including the Prophecy of Jonah and the whale (the three days Jonah spends in the belly of the whale foreshadow the three days of Christ in the tomb) and the Prophecy of Daniel (The three youths saved from the fiery furnace). The Liturgy of St. Basil follows. This is a longer liturgy than that of St. John Chrysostom. The Resurrection service begins with the chanting of the Canon of Good Friday at 11:00 p.m. This is a summary, if you will, of the events of Holy Week. There is an actual closing to the period of the Great Lent, where petitions are said for the well-being of the community as we close the Lenten season and anticipate the Resurrection. The Great and Holy Lent concludes with “Through the Prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us and save us.” This is traditionally how we end all the services in our church, except for those services between Easter and Ascension. “Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers. . .” will not be said again in the church until Ascension. The lights in the church are completely extinguished, except for the Vigil Candle on the Altar Table.*

*The priest lights his candle from a solitary light in the altar, the vigil candle that is in front of the tabernacle. He comes through the Royal Doors and chants “Come receive the Light, from the everlasting Light and glorify Christ, who is risen from the dead.” The light is then “passed” to all in the church. A procession is made outside to the empty tomb, where the Gospel of the Resurrection is read and we sing “Christos Anesti-Christ is Risen” proclaiming the Resurrection of Christ. We then return to the church and turn all the lights on, and celebrate the Divine Liturgy for the “feast of feasts” the Resurrection of our Lord.*



*Having celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the early hours of the morning, there is no Liturgy at 10:00 a.m. on Easter Sunday, ironically the only Sunday of the year where that is the case. On Easter Sunday morning, we celebrate the Agape Vespers from 11:00 a.m.-noon. This is a brief service where we chant “Christos Anesti” many times and read the Gospel in many languages. This is a reminder to us that we are to share the good news of the Resurrection of Christ to all peoples in all languages.*



# THE HOLY WEEK PLAN

Here is an idea to help you get the most out of your Holy Week experience this year. (Obviously it is the ideal to attend as many services as possible each year, because Holy Week is where we re-learn, re-live and recommit to the message of salvation that plays out in the services. For those who are retired or not working, this is a great opportunity to attend all of the Divine Services) Here is a practical guide to celebrating Holy Week this year:

*Choose at least one service from each scene, 1-4 and 6.*

*I consider scene five almost “optional.”*

**Scene One**-Pick either Saturday of Lazarus or Palm Sunday, to experience the “joy” and “hope” of these feasts, as well as the temporary break from the austerity of Great Lent

**Scene Two**-Pick at least one of the early services of Holy Week, either an evening Bridegroom service or a morning Pre-Sanctified Liturgy and you’ll get a better understanding of the theme of watchfulness.

**Scene Three**-Pick either Holy Unction on Holy Wednesday or the Liturgy on Holy Thursday morning to experience healing and the Institution of the Holy Eucharist. Ideally, pick both so you can receive Holy Unction and Holy Communion

**Scene Four**-After the final scene of the Resurrection, SCENE FOUR is the most important. It is very important for us to stand with Christ as He hangs on the cross. Holy Thursday evening, Good Friday morning and Good Friday afternoon afford us this opportunity, so choose at least one of these to attend.

**Scene Five** (optional)—While one of the most popular services of Holy Week, Good Friday evening is not even one of the most important or moving. Come to this one only if you’ve done a good number of the other ones.

**Scene Six**—The victory scene—It is obviously most important, after the journey of Great Lent, to experience the joy of the resurrection. Pick either Holy Saturday morning, Holy Saturday evening or the Agape Vespers on Sunday morning.



## AND NOW A COUPLE OF WORDS ABOUT SUBSTANCE



As I said at the outset, no other Christian Church in the world has the FORM of the Orthodox when it comes to celebrating Holy Week—the processions, the pageantry, the vast amount of scripture readings, and the moving hymns. Unfortunately, for many, we almost worship for the form, forgetting the substance. This is apparent even in how we speak about the services. We say that on Holy Wednesday, we go to church to “get the oil.” Yet, it’s more than that—we go to be anointed for “healing of soul and body.” It’s so much more than getting the oil. We tend to focus on the “souvenirs” of Holy Week—That’s why many people come just to the services where they get to take something home, like oil on Holy Wednesday, or a flower on Good Friday or a Palm on Palm Sunday, but they don’t come to Holy Monday evening, or the Great Hours of Good Friday. Many people come to church on Pascha who never come to church during the year, and they light their candle, sing Christos Anesti and think they’ve done a great thing.

The most important thing about Holy Week is the substance. The opportunity to receive Holy Communion 10 times in 11 days is an opportunity to keep ourselves in a perpetual state of readiness. Holy Wednesday is an opportunity to pray for our own physical and spiritual healing. Holy Thursday is an opportunity to kneel before the Cross of Christ, and leave anger and disappointment at the foot of His cross. The long Holy Week Book provides us an opportunity to relearn what it is we believe about Jesus Christ, salvation, heaven, the Resurrection and many other topics. Just about all of our theology in the Orthodox Church is found in the Holy Week Book.

So, make a Holy Week plan for yourself, invest some time in the form, open your heart to the substance, and I guarantee you will have a meaningful Holy Week journey. May our journeys bring each of us spiritual comfort, refreshment and renewal, and may we rejoice in the Resurrection of Christ on Pascha and throughout the year.

+Fr. Stavros

# Meals on Wheels, the Church, the Last Judgement and Some Exciting News for our Parish and our Future

*Sermon by Fr. Stavros on Sunday, March 10*

Last Thursday, I was invited to attend a breakfast celebrating Meals on Wheels. Meals on wheels is a charitable organization whose mission is to get food to people who are homebound, specifically our seniors. It costs \$5.50 per meal and participants pay what they are able to pay. Some pay the full \$5.50 because their issue isn't money, it is that they can't get out and shop. Some pay less than \$5.50 because they are on fixed incomes and can't afford it. Drivers volunteer to deliver the meals. In addition to providing food to people who otherwise do not have the means to get it, meals on wheels provides some social contact to many people who are lonely. Meals on Wheels is a pretty big organization. There are administrators, people who earn a salary for running the organization. There are costs, like food, insurance, office space. There are volunteers who do a lot of the leg work. And ultimately, seniors are fed healthy meals, and those on meals on wheels are much less likely to be hospitalized because they are getting nutrition as well as a boost to their mental health. It costs, we heard, less money to feed one person for an entire year than for them to stay one night in a hospital. This breakfast the other day was pretty nice. It was at Armature Works, we had nice food, served on real plates, the tables even had tablecloths on them. I'm sure it cost a decent amount of money to put on that breakfast. There were several speakers, including the director, who shared the message of what Meals on Wheels is to people like me who didn't really know what it was all about. At the end of the meal there was an ask for financial help and for volunteer help and many were inspired to give. I think we will be adding Meals on Wheels to our yearly charitable giving. Gosh, for \$2,000 a year (remember \$5.50 a day times 365 days), we could make sure ONE person is fed, we could save someone's life. There were approximately 500 people at the breakfast. It probably cost \$50 per person to put on that meal—that \$25,000. Maybe it cost more than that. Maybe it cost \$100 per person, maybe it cost \$50,000. However, if each person that went donated \$2,000, as I would like for our church to do, then the event raised \$1,000,000 minus expenses of \$25,000 or \$50,000, you can see what a small investment netted, not only in terms of income for the organization, but money to be put to use to feed people who are hungry.

Now, let's imagine for a moment that all we did the other day was have a very nice breakfast and heard some nice presentations and no one gave anything. It would have been a nice breakfast and an inspiring message, and we would have all gotten up feeling full—of food and inspiration. Which would quickly have felt empty, because we heard a message, and got a meal, but did nothing with it.

Throughout the event, I was thinking how this was analogous to the church. This organization has a paid CEO. I'm not sure how many meals he delivers, but I'm sure he delivers some. His primary role is to inspire people with the message and mission of Meals on Wheels. There are many people who are responsible for cooking meals—they don't deliver them, but they are certainly important. There is probably someone whose sole job is to organize the once a year breakfast—maybe they don't deliver a single meal or cook anything, but in organizing the breakfast, they help raise \$1M and lots of meals get cooked and delivered. Now imagine if people donated \$50 each the other day. That would have covered just the \$50 meal, there would have been nothing left for charitable outreach. And this is where generosity comes in. A meaningful message touches the heartstrings of people who are then inspired to give. There are two reasons why I would like to support meals on wheels. The first is a

Godly one—it helps fulfill two of the things in the Gospel lesson today that Christ says we will be judged on—I was hungry and you fed me, and I was in prison in you visited me. Yes, Meals on Wheels helps to feed the hungry. And prisons are not just buildings with bars on the windows. Many seniors are in prisons of isolation and loneliness, many are stuck at home, they can never leave. The second reason is a self-serving one. As the speaker pointed out, we are all going to get old one day, we will not be forever young. I have no idea how my life will end. I might be homebound one day. I might need Meals on Wheels to save my own life.

Let's get back to how this relates to the church. We are a charitable organization. We exist to spread the word of God and to help others—Acts 6 talks about the TWO tasks that the early church had. There is overhead in this organization. We pay the priest, administrative help, etc. There are facilities to maintain. We have a beautiful church sanctuary in which to worship—we should, nothing wrong with that. Just like there was nothing wrong having breakfast at an exclusive venue the other morning. There is nothing wrong with fellowship, I enjoyed meeting people the other day and catching up with people I already knew. There is nothing wrong with good food—a luncheon, a dinner dance, these are good things. But it has to go beyond that. Meals on Wheels doesn't exist in order to get a bunch of people together for breakfast once a year. It exists to make sure hungry people get food, and lonely people have some socialization. And the church doesn't exist just so we can worship and hear a good message once a week, or so we can have friends to hang out with or even a culture to celebrate. The church exists in order to make a difference in the world. First, by spreading the message of the Gospel through learning, and sharing the message of the Gospel by living it.

It is time to think about the next steps for our church. There are two significant facts about our church community. First, our church is too small. On most Sundays it cannot hold everyone who comes to worship. It is also aging. It needs a new Air conditioning system, there is damage to the dome, we need some electrical rewiring. We need handicap access. It's time to have a bathroom in the church. We need a real narthex. Most of all, we need more seats. Fact number two, in July 2025, at the latest, we will no longer have a tenant renting our facilities. We will have use of our facilities full-time. These two facts present to us two opportunities. First, to expand the church to accommodate the increasing number of people who want to worship here. Some of these people have moved to Florida. But most of them are not in this category. Most of them are people who are already in this area who are flocking to Orthodoxy, which is seeing an influx of converts in many communities. We've already Chrismated 7 people this year. The record for a year in our church is 8. We will break that before Pascha. There are also three adult baptisms on the schedule between now and Pascha. The second opportunity is an opportunity to present Christ to the world, both by word and by deed. We have a small committee on developing a vision for our church. We had our first meeting the other night. There is a large closet in the school building that is too small to be a classroom. It also has no windows. What if we made that into a sound studio, and then volunteers came in and read the Messenger or the Prayer Team onto a podcast, so that our aging parishioners who have a hard time seeing and reading can hear the message, or our younger and busy parishioners who don't have time to read can listen to an inspiring message in the car. What if



we used our facilities to become a hub for Meals on Wheels, not the place where the meals are cooked, but a place where they are delivered and picked up to be taken to the people who will receive them. In our meeting the other night, we told one another to dream of the possibilities of what we can do with our campus when it is ours again.

Because just like Meals on Wheels isn't into the fancy breakfast business—they are into the helping get food to shut ins business—the church should not be in the rental/landlord business, or the fundraising Greek festival business, or the let's have activities and ministries only for ourselves business. We are in the business of spreading the word of God by speaking it and by living it, by teaching and by serving. And having an updated and expanded church, and full use of our facilities, which also need a facelift, this will help us to be the church that Christ envisioned when He told His Disciples to take the Gospel to all nations, to make disciples, to teach all that He commanded.

One day, sooner or later, you and I are each going to stand in judgment before the Lord. We read that in the Gospel lesson today. I've been writing about it on the Prayer Team for the past two months. And we will each make an account of what we did with our lives, with our opportunities. Imagine what it would feel like to stand in front of Jesus and hear Him say "I was hungry and you didn't feed Me; I was a stranger and you did not welcome Me; I was in prison and you did not visit Me." Imagine Him saying "I needed your help and you didn't help Me." Or even worse "I gave you the means to help others and you kept all those means for yourselves." I'm not talking about the kind of "help" the politicians talk about—giving people handouts, or giving into demands to give people what they somehow feel entitled to, so that they can be enabled. I'm talking about the kind of help that is a hand up, the kind of help that empowers people to better themselves and the kind of help that goes to people who have worked hard and have fallen on hard times. Whether that is offering tutoring to people who want to read, or a parenting class for people who want to be better parents. Or offering a seminar, as we are today, to help take the fear out of the end of life. Or offering charitable donations to ministries like IOCC that respond to natural disasters, or Meals on Wheels, that gets food to the elderly shut-ins, or Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry, which goes into prisons to help encourage the incarcerated to repent and reintegrate into society; or our community outreach which provides food and service to those who are hungry and trying to get off the streets.

At the end of the breakfast the other day, the speaker got up and said "we are making a direct ask, for money to support our mission." There was no shame in the ask by the speaker. There was also no guiltling the people into giving. There was no sense of desperation either. Just a sense of joy that comes from helping people and knowing that you made a difference in the lives of others. I have never felt comfortable with the direct ask for money, because that direct ask, when I have heard it in Orthodox churches my entire life, has always been followed by shame, guilt and desperation. And those are not good motivators for pretty much anything. So, I'm going to get better at the direct ask, and I hope you'll respond, because this vision that we are creating about an expanded church and full use of our facilities is going to be one of joy, because there is a joy in the message of Jesus Christ, and there is a joy in sharing it by word and especially by deed.

There is a joy in giving to Christ. I don't have time to be a volunteer for Meals on Wheels right now. Maybe at some other point in my life. But if I give to this organization, then when I watch those videos on how this ministry helps seniors stay healthy and at home, I will feel part of that joy as well. Because it doesn't matter if

you organized the breakfast, cook the food, deliver it, or pay for it—everyone who gives to Meals on Wheels shares in the joy of its success and more important in the joy of the Lord over its success. And it's the same thing with the church. Whether you are the priest, the Sunday school teacher, the Parish Council Member, the worshipper, the financial contributor—in whatever way you are a steward, you also will share the joy of the success of the church, and more importantly the joy of the Lord over its success. This past week, this Church offered two Bible studies, 12 Sunday school classes, a Paraklesis, heard several confessions, prayed with several people who were sick, helped someone make peace with an impending surgery, was there to pick up the pieces for someone who is getting divorced, sent out seven Prayer Team Messages, worked on a series of presentations for Great Lent, set up several memorial services, and many other things. If you are a steward of this church, you participated in all those things, whether you were physically present or not, whether you know it or not.

We will each stand in judgment before God and give an accounting of what we did with our lives—with our time, with our talent, with our money, with our opportunities. If we were generous or stingy, if we only looked in or if we looked out, if we worried only about ourselves or if we worried about others, if we were concerned only with building material wealth and not spiritual wealth. God will judge what we did as a parish—did we make enough just to get by or were we generous in giving out help. We serve a great meal here every Sunday, the banquet that is the Divine Liturgy—no one celebrates the Liturgy better than us. We have some great events here. But it has to be more than that. Just like that breakfast the other morning was phenomenal. Good food, good people, but Meals on Wheels is more than that. And the Greek Orthodox Church is more than what we are.

Great Lent begins in a week. There will be many meals on Wednesday nights. There will be many presentations on Wednesday nights, a Philoptochos retreat, Bible Studies, etc. There will be many banquets—the Divine Liturgy will be celebrated more than 30 times in the next two months, we will average one service a day from now through May 10. So come and worship, come and eat, come and learn, but this has to be a platform to go and teach, go and serve and go and model for others what it means to be a Christian. Because our world is in such desperate need—there are so many people who are hungry for food and for conversation, so many who are naked when it comes to self-esteem, who need some encouragement, and some who are naked and need clothing; there are so many who are in prisons of misery, some with bars and most without; prisons of loneliness, fear, and shame. There are so many people who are sick, physically, mentally, spiritually. And we have the opportunity to help them. We have the obligation to help them. We have the privilege to help them. And there is a joy that comes with serving others.

The other day, when the breakfast was eaten and the speeches had been given, the forms went around and people eagerly filled them out—they felt encouraged and empowered to go and make a difference. Well, the speeches continue here, and so do the meals, but the ask is coming and I hope the response is the same—encouraging and empowering—all of us going and making a difference by sharing, and most importantly, living, the Gospel of Jesus Christ far beyond the walls of this church. It starts with the walls, it starts with the banquet of the Liturgy, just like Meals on Wheels started the other day with a banquet in a beautiful setting. But it can't end there. Where it ends is up to you. God has already told us where He wants it to end. And He will judge each of us based on how far we advance that message to His desired end.

# Liturgical Schedule for April

|                           |   |   |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Tuesday, April 2</b>   | Great Compline  | 5:30 p.m.   |
| <b>Wednesday, April 3</b> | 9th Hour<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy  | 5:30 p.m.<br>6:00 p.m.                            |
| <b>Friday, April 5</b>    | 9th Hour<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy<br>Salutations to the Virgin Mary-3rd Stanza   | 9:30 a.m.<br>10:00 a.m.<br>6:30 p.m.              |
| <b>Sunday, April 7</b>    | <b>3rd Sunday of Great Lent—Veneration of the Holy Cross</b><br>Orthros 8:30 a.m.                      Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.<br>Procession of the Holy Cross at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy |   |
| Tuesday, April 9          | Great Compline  | 5:30 p.m.   |
| Wednesday, April 10       | 9th Hour<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy  | 5:30 p.m.<br>6:00 p.m.                            |
| Friday, April 12          | 9th Hour<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy  | 9:30 a.m.<br>10:00 a.m.                           |
| Sunday, April 14          | 4th Sunday of Great Lent—St. John of the Ladder<br>Orthros 8:30 a.m.                      Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.  |   |
| Tuesday, April 16         | Great Compline  | 5:30 p.m.   |
| Wednesday, April 17       | 9th Hour<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy  | 5:30 p.m.<br>6:00 p.m.                            |
| Friday, April 19          | 9th Hour<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy<br>Vigil of the Akathist<br>Akathist Hymn<br>Divine Liturgy  | 9:30 a.m.<br>10:00 a.m.<br>6:30 p.m.<br>8:15 p.m. |
| Sunday, April 21          | 5th Sunday of Great Lent—St. Mary of Egypt<br>Orthros 8:30 a.m.                      Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.   |   |
| Tuesday, April 23         | Great Compline  | 5:30 p.m.   |
| Wednesday, April 24       | 9th Hour<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy  | 5:30 p.m.<br>6:00 p.m.                            |
| Friday, April 26          | 9th Hour<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy  | 9:30 a.m.<br>10:00 a.m.                           |

## Holy Week—April 27-May 5—See Special Schedule

|                  |   |                           |
|------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Monday, May 6    | Bright Monday-Feast of St. George<br>Orthros 9:00 a.m.                        | Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. |
| Wednesday, May 8 | St. John the Theologian<br>Orthros 9:00 a.m.                                  | Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. |
| Friday, May 10   | Life-Giving Fountain of the Virgin Mary (Zodochos Peghe)<br>Orthros 9:00 a.m. | Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. |



# HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE 2024

## HOLY WEEK AND PASCHA EASTER SCHEDULE FOR 2024

## ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑ ΑΚΟΛΟΥΘΙΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΛΗΣ ΕΒΔΟΜΑΔΟΣ 2024

### April 27 - *Saturday of Lazarus-Commemoration of the raising of Lazarus from the dead*

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Proskomide 9:30a.m.  
Divine Liturgy 10:00-11:15 a.m.

\*Fr. Stavros will celebrate the service of the Proskomide, the Preparation of the Holy Communion on the solea at 9:30 a.m. GOYA and Sunday School students are requested to attend to help in preparing the crosses for Palm Sunday, after Liturgy.

### April 28 - *Palm Sunday-The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem*

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.-noon  
Vespers 5:00-6:00 p.m.

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

Procession of the Icon of the Nymphios

Theme: Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church; watchfulness

### April 29 - *Holy Monday*

9th Hour 9:00 a.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 9:30-11:00 a.m.  
Service of the Bridegroom 6:30-8:00 p.m.

Theme: The Parable of the Talents

### April 30 - *Holy Tuesday*

9th Hour 9:00 a.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 9:30-11:00 a.m.  
Service of the Bridegroom 6:30-8:30 p.m.

The Choir will sing the Hymn of Kassiane

Theme: Repentance of the harlot vs. the Betrayal by Judas

### May 1 - *Holy Wednesday*

9th Hour 9:00 a.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 9:30-11:00 a.m.  
Sacrament of Holy Unction for Children 3:00-4:00 p.m.

Matins of Holy Thursday-5:15-7:00 p.m.

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

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

### May 2 - *Holy Thursday*

Vespers and Divine Liturgy of St. Basil 9:15-11:00 a.m.  
Service of the Holy Passion 6:30-10:00 p.m.

Reading of the 12 Gospels, Procession of the Crucified Christ

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

All-Night Vigil will follow the service

### May 3 - *Good Friday*

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

Standing vigil at the Cross of Christ

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

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

Lamentations 7:00-10:30 p.m. Singing of the Funeral

Lamentations and Procession with the Epitaphios

### May 4 - *Holy Saturday*

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

Reading of Prophecies foretelling the Resurrection of Christ

Great Canon 11:00 p.m.

### May 5 - *PASCHA*

The Service of the Resurrection of Christ-Midnight

Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom 12:30-2:00 a.m.

Following Liturgy, all are invited to a reception in the Kourmolis Center

AGAPE Vespers 11:00 a.m.-noon

Easter Vespers of Love-The Gospel is read in numerous languages to indicate the universal character of the Christian message

Easter Egg Hunt for Children NOON

### Σάββατο, 27 Απριλίου - *Σάββατο του Λαζάρου*

Ορθος 8:30-9:30 π.μ.

Ακολουθία τη Θεία Προσκομιδή 9:30-10:00 π.μ.

Θεία Λειτουργία 10:00-11:15 π.μ.

### Κυριακή, 28 Απριλίου - *Κυριακή των Βαιων*

Ορθος 8:30 π.μ. Θεία Λειτουργία 9:45 π.μ.

Κατανυκτικό Εσπερινο 5:00-6:00 μ.μ.

Ακολουθία Νυμφίου 6:30-8:00 μ.μ.

### Δευτέρα, 29 Απριλίου - *Μεγάλη Δευτέρα*

Ενατη Ώρα 9:00-9:30 π.μ.

Θεία Λειτουργία των Προηγιασμένων Δωρών 9:30-11:00 π.μ.

### Τρίτη, 30 Απριλίου - *Μεγάλη Τρίτη*

Ενατη Ώρα 9:00-9:30 π.μ.

Θεία Λειτουργία των Προηγιασμένων Δωρών 9:30-11:00 π.μ.

Ακολουθία Νυμφίου 6:30-8:00 μ.μ.

### Τετάρτη, 1 Μαΐου - *Μεγάλη Τετάρτη*

Ενατη Ώρα 9:00-9:30 π.μ.

Θεία Λειτουργία των Προηγιασμένων Δωρών 9:30-11:00 π.μ.

Ακολουθία Ευχελαιονγία τα παιδιά 3:00-4:00 μ.μ.

Ακολουθία Νυμφίου 5:15-7:00 μ.μ.

Ακολουθία Ευχελαιον 7:00-8:30 μ.μ.

### Πέμπτη, 2 Μαΐου - *Μεγάλη Πέμπτη*

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

Ακολουθία Σταυρωσεως 6:30-10:00 μ.μ.

### Παρασκευή, 3 Μαΐου - *Μεγάλη Παρασκευή*

Οι Βασιλικές Ώρες 9:00-11:00 π.μ.

Αποκαθηλωσις 3:00-4:15 μ.μ.

Επιταφιος Θρηνος 7:00-10:30 μ.μ.

### Σάββατο, 4 Μαΐου - *Μεγάλο Σάββατο*

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

Ο Κανων 11:00 μ.μ.

Ακολουθία της Αναστασεως Μεσανυχτα

Θεία Λειτουργία της Αναστασεως 12:30-2:15 π.μ.

### Κυριακή, 5 Μαΐου - *Αγίω Πασχα*

Μεγας Εσπερινος της Αγαπης 11:00 π.μ.



# Liturgical Notes for April

## **Divine Liturgy to begin at 9:45 a.m. on the Sundays of Great Lent**

Since the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great is offered on each Sunday of Lent, and this Divine Liturgy is slightly longer than the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the Divine Liturgy will begin at 9:45 a.m. from March 24-April 28. The Choir will begin the Doxology at 9:35 a.m.

## **Tuesdays of Lent - Great Compline**

The service of the Great Compline will be read on the following Tuesdays of Lent - April 2, April 9, April 16 and April 23. This service lasts about an hour and consists of Psalms and hymns of repentance. Service Books for this service will be available.

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

The Divine Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts (also called Pre-Sanctified Liturgy) will be held on the Wednesdays during Great Lent. This service consists of Vespers with Holy Communion that was “Pre-Sanctified” the previous Sunday. It is an opportunity to receive Holy Communion frequently during the season of fasting. The Pre-Sanctified Liturgy is preceded by the reading of the 9th Hour, a short service with penitential prayers as well as the recitation of the Creed, a pre-requisite for the reception of Holy Communion. Service books for this service will be available. The Pre-Sanctified Liturgy will be celebrated on the following Wednesdays of Great Lent: Wednesday, March 20; Wednesday, March 27; Wednesday, April 3; Wednesday, April 10; Wednesday, April 17 and Wednesday, April 24. Several of our ministries will host a dinner as indicated on the schedule below. Each ministry is encouraged to attend at least one Pre-Sanctified Liturgy as follows:

|                     |                                 |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| Wednesday, April 3  | AHEPA/Daughters                 |
| Wednesday, April 10 | Young at Heart/Welcome Ministry |
| Wednesday, April 17 | Philoptochos                    |
| Wednesday, April 24 | Bible Study/Young Adults        |

## **Fridays of Lent - 9th Hour and Pre-Sanctified Liturgy**

The Pre-Sanctified Liturgy has Traditionally been celebrated on Wednesdays AND Fridays of Great Lent. The 9th Hour will begin at 9:30 a.m., with the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy from 10:00-11:15 a.m. The Pre-Sanctified Liturgy will be held on the Fridays of Lent as follows: Friday, April 5; Friday, April 12; Friday, April 19 & Friday, April 26.

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

This service also lasts about an hour and is a series of prayers and devotions that invoke the intercessions of the Virgin Mary for our salvation. It will be held on April 5, April 12 and April 19.

## **Sunday, April 7 - Third Sunday of Lent - Veneration of the Holy Cross**

On the 3rd Sunday of Great Lent we celebrate the Veneration of the Cross; the Cross helps us to prepare for the Crucifixion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are not just witnessing from afar the passions of our Lord, but we participate in them. In the Synaxarion we read, “Through the forty-day fast, we too are in a way crucified, dying to the passions.” Our efforts to keep up with the Fast, through prayer, fasting and almsgiving, might take a toll over our bodies; we need help and encouragement, and the help and encouragement comes from the power of the Cross. In the middle of Great Lent, the Church gives its faithful a sign of victory, one that can bring strength to them in this time of fasting. The Sunday of the Holy Cross is one that brings everything into perspective, especially with the Gospel reading (Mark 8:34-9:1), the Lord saying to all His disciples: “If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” A special procession of the Holy Cross, on a tray covered with flowers, will be held at the end of the Divine Liturgy.

## **Sunday, April 14 - Fourth Sunday of Lent - St. John Climacus**

St. John of the Ladder was only 16 years old when he left Palestine and went to St. Catherine’s monastery (at Mt. Sinai, Egypt). He lived there for 50 years, where he wrote his famous book, The Ladder of Divine Ascent. This

is a spiritual ladder. Christians follow certain rules so that they can get closer to God, and symbolically climb to heaven. He had struggles, like any person does, but he won over those struggles that the Devil put for him. That's why we celebrate his memory on this Sunday of Lent. St. John is a perfect example of how a person could be faithful all of their life, and be together with God in the Kingdom of Heaven.

### **Friday, April 19 - Vigil of the Akathist**

It is the tradition of the Orthodox Church (practiced in monasteries and in a few parishes) that the Akathist Hymn is celebrated as part of an all-night vigil, culminating in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. A Vigil is when more than one service is held in sequence. We will begin the Akathist Hymn at 6:30 p.m. on Friday, March 31, followed by the Divine Liturgy at 8:15 p.m., with both services concluding by 9:30 p.m. This will afford us the opportunity to pray the Divine Liturgy together in a more subdued atmosphere (and how often do we get to celebrate Liturgy at night in our church?) and to receive Holy Communion on this very special feast day. For those who wish to receive Holy Communion, please abstain from food after 2:00 p.m. on that Friday.

### **Sunday, April 21– Fifth Sunday of Lent - St. Mary of Egypt**

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

### **Why does Liturgy seem longer on Sundays during Lent?**

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

### **Sacrament of Confession**

Many people have already made appointments for their confessions to be heard, many for the first time in their lives. It is confidential. It helps you reconnect with God and unburden yourself of guilt. It helps you to make a new start in your spiritual journey and is an integral part of any successful Lenten journey. If you have questions about confession, please ask. There is no better way to prepare for Pascha than to receive this sacrament. Confessions will be heard up to April 27, and then again after Pascha. Please make your appointment as soon as possible with Fr. Stavros or Fr. John, because our priests like to give people whatever time they need. As it gets closer to Holy Week and more and more people are coming, they must go quicker, and it is very important not to be rushed in this Sacrament.

### **Looking Ahead to Holy Week—We need someone to take charge of the Vigil at the Cross this Year**

For over ten years now, we've had an all night vigil at the Cross on Holy Thursday night through Good Friday evening. That duty was taken care of by our pastoral assistant. Since we have no pastoral assistant at present, we need someone (or a couple of people) to step up if we are going to have this event again. This involves setting up a method for people to sign up, and then actually being at the church for the duration of the vigil which is 10:00 p.m. Thursday evening (May 2) through Friday evening (May 3) when the vigil ends at 7:00 p.m. If there are two or three people who can split up the time, that is ideal. If you would like more information or are interested in leading this, please contact Fr. Stavros.

# Guidelines for Holy Week

## Saturday of Lazarus- April 27 -

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

## Making Palm Crosses-

We will have a free breakfast after the Divine Liturgy on Saturday of Lazarus, April 8, and will make Palm Crosses after the breakfast. Many hands make light work, so please come for Liturgy, breakfast and making Palm Crosses.

## Palm Sunday afternoon-The Vespers of Holy Monday-

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

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

Traditionally, the Matins or Orthros is done in the early morning hours, ending with the sunrise, when the Great Doxology is sung or read. The Orthros or Matins Services of Holy Week are VERY long, lasting almost three and a half hours. During the Middle Ages, the services were transposed ahead several hours, from the early morning hours to the evening of the preceding night. Thus, the Orthros of Good Friday was moved to Holy Thursday evening, the 12 Gospels and the Procession of the Crucified Christ. The Lamentations, which is the Orthros of Holy Saturday was moved from Saturday morning to Friday night. The Vespers services, was moved from Holy Thursday evening to Holy Thursday morning. Our services commemorate events about 12 hours before they happened in real time, with the Last Supper Holy Thursday morning, the Crucifixion Holy Thursday evening, etc. The Descent from the Cross on Friday afternoon remains at its proper time, as a Vespers service, but the interval between the Vespers of Friday afternoon and the Orthros of Holy Saturday does not. The Resurrection Service takes place at the proper time. The schedule of transposing services begins Palm Sunday when we celebrate Orthros and Liturgy

in the morning and then in the evening, we celebrate Vespers (appropriately in the evening) and immediately after the Orthros (Bridegroom service). From then on, we are approximately 12 hours ahead in what would have been happening during Holy Week. The Vespers of Good Friday afternoon are at the appropriate time. Then the Lamentations (Orthros of Holy Saturday) is celebrated a couple of hours later. We finally catch up with Pascha, celebrated in the middle of the night, the same hour as the Resurrection happened.

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

These three Pre-Sanctified Liturgies include important Scripture readings—from Exodus, from Job and from the Gospels. The Gospel readings are the last teachings of Jesus to His disciples on Holy Monday and Holy Tuesday. The Gospel of Holy Wednesday morning is the first act of the Passion, the betrayal by Judas. The Scripture readings of these services are an important part of the Holy Week narrative.

## Holy Tuesday Evening—His Grace Bishop Sevastianos of Zela to Visit our Community-

His Grace Bishop Sevastianos of Zela will be with us and preside over the Service of the Bridegroom on Holy Tuesday Evening. Please join us in welcoming His Grace again to our community.

## Holy Unction-

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



### **Bridegroom Service for the Last Supper-**

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

### **Holy Thursday Evening - The Service of the Passion-**

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

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

For the past eleven years, we have done an All-Night Vigil at the Cross of Christ. Those who participated found it VERY inspiring. The vigil will begin following the service

of the 12 Gospels and will continue until the service of the Lamentations on Good Friday Evening. Thus, beginning at 6:30 p.m. on Holy Thursday, there will be 28 continuous hours of prayer in our church. This way, even those who can't come out in the middle of the night can participate by taking a shift during the day. The schedule will be as follows:

#### **Holy Thursday Evening**

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

#### **Good Friday**

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

We will have a sign-up sheet for people to sign up for some time to stand at the Cross and read from the book of Psalms. It will be a sign-up genius that will come out via constant contact shortly before Holy Week. The Young Adults will be coordinating this for us. If you have any questions, please contact Andrea Tsatalis at [andreatsatalis@gmail.com](mailto:andreatsatalis@gmail.com).

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

## **Good Friday**

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

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

**The Lamentations and the Epitaphios Procession -** The Lamentations are short, poetic verses lamenting the Passion, Death and Burial of Christ. Interspersed with the Lamentations are Psalm verses from Psalm 119, the same verses we sing at a funeral service, which is appropriate, as the Lamentations are the funeral service for the Lord. The service starts with the Canon, and after the Canon is complete, the priest opens the Royal Doors, the lights are turned up, and the Lamentations begin. Everyone is invited to sing together. Books will be provided for your use. For the past four years, we have held the procession indoors, walking around both the interior of the hall and the church, with everyone having an opportunity to pass under the Epitaphios, symbolizing how one day we hope to pass through death to eternal life.

## Holy Saturday

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

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

### **Reading of the Resurrection Gospel at the Agape Vespers-**

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

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

of the services and pray the prayers of Thanksgiving in the back of the Liturgy book.

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

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

**Pascha versus Easter -** In every language except English and German, the feast of the Resurrection is identified with a word whose root is "Pasch." For instance, in Spanish, the word is "Pasqual." "Pascha" comes from the Hebrew for "Passover." The first Passover occurred in the Old Testament book of Exodus. The last of the 10 plagues on the Egyptians was the death of the first born son. The Hebrews were told to slaughter an unblemished lamb outside the city wall on a Friday, to not break any of its bones, and to spread it's

blood over their doorways. Those who had the blood of the lamb on their homes would be spared. The angel of death then came to the Egyptians and killed the first-born son in each home. Passover was a holiday celebrating the deliverance of the Hebrews from the bondage of Pharaoh and his taskmasters. The Crucifixion occurred at the Passover—the Lamb of God was killed outside the city wall on a Friday, none of His bones were broken, and by His blood we are set free from the bondage of sin and death. “Easter” comes from the word “Oestre” and was actually a Pagan holiday each spring. That’s why in the Orthodox Church, and in our personal lives, we try to use the word “Pascha” to describe the feast of the Resurrection, rather than Easter.

### **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 “Αληθῶς 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 May 4 is on the Feast of Pentecost (June 23) at the Vespers of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, when the priest says “Again and again on bended knees let us pray to the Lord.”

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

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

### **Excused Absences from School for Good Friday**

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

## **Three Divine Liturgies During Bright Week**

**Monday, May 6 – St. George** -St. George the “Trophy Bearer” is one of the most famous saints of our church. He lived in the third century. He was a soldier, famously memorialized in icons as slaying a dragon. Symbolically, he “slayed” the “dragons” that opposed Christianity and was martyred for his faith. His relics were placed in the altar of our church when it was consecrated in 1986. St. George’s feast day is celebrated on the Monday after Pascha when Pascha falls on April 23 or later (when Pascha falls earlier than April 23, we celebrate his feastday on April 23). Thus, this year, we will celebrate his feastday on Bright Monday, May 6.

**Wednesday, 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.

**Friday, May 10 - Feast of the Life-Giving Fountain - Friday after Pascha-** Commemorates the consecration of a Chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary, which was built over a spring in Constantinople, that emits water with healing powers. Hundreds of miracles and healings have occurred at this spring. This feast day of “Ζωοδόχος Πηγή” the Feast of the Life-Giving Fountain, is always celebrated on the Friday of Bright (Renewal) week, the week after Pascha, April 21, this year.



## ALTAR BOY SCHEDULE FOR LENT

**CAPTAINS**

Demetri Passalaris  
 Nicholas Akrotirianakis  
 Nicholas Magos  
 Nicholas Carter  
 George Xenick  
 PJ Zelatis

**St. Matthew**

Gabriel Gonzales  
 Michael Galin  
 Philip Kane  
 Evan Queen  
 Kenny Kane  
 Peter Konstas  
 Michael Svintsitskiy  
 Michael Kwasny

**St. Mark**

Michael Snyder  
 Zachary Carter  
 Dorian Setzer-Torres  
 Leo Lenardos  
 Niko Kyrus  
 Josh Roby

**St. Luke**

Teddy Kafentaris  
 Andreas Stefanou  
 Kris Christopher  
 Vasilios Panos  
 Jonah Blankenbaker  
 Theodore Edquid  
 Michael Meadows

**St. John**

Christos Nenos  
 Constantine Ameres  
 Zachary George  
 Louis Mantzanas  
 Gianni Matassini  
 Nathan Moran

|                     |                        |           |  |
|---------------------|------------------------|-----------|--|
| Wednesday, April 3  | Pre-Sanctified Liturgy | 5:30 p.m. | George Xenick and St. Mark               |
| Friday, April 5     | Salutations            | 6:30 p.m. | Demetri Passalaris and St. Matthew       |
| Wednesday, April 10 | Pre-Sanctified Liturgy | 5:30 p.m. | PJ Zelatis and St. John                  |
| Friday, April 12    | Salutations            | 6:30 p.m. | Nicholas Magos and St. Luke              |
| Wednesday, April 17 | Pre-Sanctified Liturgy | 5:30 p.m. | Nicholas Akrotirianakis and St. Matthew  |
| Friday, April 19    | Akathist Hymn          | 6:30 p.m. | George Xenick and St. Mark               |
| Wednesday, April 24 | Pre-Sanctified Liturgy | 5:30 p.m. | Nicholas Carter, PJ Zelatis and St. Luke |

*\* An Altar Boy Schedule for Holy Week will be mailed to each altar boy in early April.*

### Parish Registry

- Chrismation**-Alexander Ali (Constantine) Behzadi was Chrismated on Sunday, February 18. Markos Mangarides was the sponsor. Congratulations!
- Chrismation**-Cassidy Nicole (Elizabeth) Major was Chrismated on Sunday, February 18. Ekaterini Petranellis-Mangarides was the sponsor. Congratulations!
- Chrismation**-Madisyn (Georgia) Hughes was Chrismated on Sunday, February 25. Ekaterini Petranellis-Mangarides was the sponsor. Congratulations!
- Chrismation**-Spencer Grady (Basil) Maxwell was Chrismated on Sunday, March 3. Anastasia Cantrell and Mike Cantrell were the sponsors. Congratulations!
- Baptism**-Luca Mullin Spinola, son of Stephen and Tara Spinola, was baptized on Saturday, March 16. Tyler Shanahan was the Godfather. Na Sas Zisi!

**PLEASE COMMEMORATE THE NAMES OF MY DEPARTED FAMILY  
 MEMBERS IN THE MEMORIAL SERVICE ON GOOD FRIDAY - May 3**

**In Memory of**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*\*\*You only need to write the first name of each person. Please mail to the church office by Monday April 29.*

*You may also email the names to [office@stjohntpa.org](mailto:office@stjohntpa.org)*



Seven Words:

THE LAST WORDS OF JESUS FROM THE CROSS  
A SIX-WEEK LENTEN STUDY  
JOIN US WEDNESDAY EVENINGS DURING GREAT LENT



MARCH 20  
FORGIVENESS

*"Father, forgive them  
for they know not what  
they do."*

Luke 23:34

DINNER SPONSORED BY  
THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

MARCH 27  
SALVATION

*And He said to him,  
"Truly, I say to you,  
today you will be with  
Me in Paradise."*

Luke 23:43

DINNER SPONSORED BY  
THE CHOIR

APRIL 3  
RELATIONSHIPS

*He said to His mother,  
"Woman, behold, your  
Son!" Then He said to  
the disciple, "Behold,  
your mother!"*

John 19:26-27

DINNER SPONSORED BY  
THE AHEPA/DAUGHTERS

APRIL 10  
ABANDONMENT/  
DISTRESS

*"My God, My God, why  
have You forsaken Me?"*

Mark 15:34

*"I thirst."*

John 19:28

DINNER SPONSORED BY  
THE YOUNG AT HEART  
AND WELCOME MINISTRY

APRIL 17  
TRIUMPH

*"It is finished."*

John 19:30

DINNER SPONSORED BY  
THE PHILOPTOCHOS

APRIL 24  
COMMIT

*"Into Your Hands I  
commit My Spirit."*

Luke 23:46

DINNER SPONSORED BY  
THE YOUNG ADULTS AND  
BIBLE STUDIES

## EACH WEDNESDAY EVENING SCHEDULE:

- 6:00 pm Pre-Sanctified Liturgy
- 7:15 pm Lenten Dinner provided by one of our ministries
- 7:45 pm Presentation by Father Stavros
- 8:05 pm Small group discussion
- 8:30 pm Concluding remarks and closing prayer



GREAT LENT 2024  
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH  
TAMPA, FL

# JOY TWEENS

*Thank you to all our JOY Tweens and parents who attended our last Sunday meeting of the year with Father Stavros on March 31.*

**This month on Friday, April 26,** JOY Tweens will have its last movie night of this school year. Please keep a look-out for more information by email, text messages, weekly church bulletins and Sunday school flyers.

In May, thanks to the gracious hospitality of our Sunday School director, Ms. Vickie, we will close out the year with a fun day on the lake. Stay tuned for more details to come!

Photos of our February offsite! Our JOY Tweens and their families enjoyed some fun winter adventures together ice skating, playing in the snow, and snow tubing at Snowcat Ridge Snow Park!



*Snowcat Ridge Snow Park!*



*The JOY Tweens Ministry plans events every month either in conjunction with HOPE/JOY or separately just for JOY Tweens. If you have children in 4th to 6th grades, please sign up for text updates or contact **Maraquet Edquid** (email: [maraquet@gmail.com](mailto:maraquet@gmail.com)/cell: 813-422-8963) with any questions.*

**Sign-Up for Text Updates!**

**To get updates and other messages for JOY Tweens, text @783gc6 to 81010 on your mobile phone.**



# CHILDREN'S GREEK SCHOOL

## THE SCHOOL OF GREEK LANGUAGE AND CULTURE VISITED THE MUSEUM OF ART IN TAMPA



On Saturday, February 24th 2024 the students, parents and teachers of the School of Greek Language and Culture visited the Museum of Art in Tampa. It was an amazing experience in which the participants had the opportunity to see and admire the beautiful exhibits from Ancient Greek and Roman Culture.

Our students got plenty of information from the tour guides of the Museum, they answered their questions and they got answers from them to their own questions.

In the Museum of Art in Tampa there are plenty of wonderful exhibits from Ancient Greece which consist of an irrefutable testimony of the brightness of Greek culture!



## GREEK PARADE IN TARPON SPRINGS



The School of Greek Language and Culture participated in the parade for the Greek Independence Day which took place in Tarpon Springs on Sunday, March 17th.

Our school had a dynamic presence in the parade. Students, parents, and teachers marched with enthusiasm waving Greek flags and bearing the banner of our school.

We honored our ancestors for their tremendous struggle to bring freedom to our country!

**ZHTΩ Η ΕΛΛΑΔΑ! - LIVE LONG GREECE!**

## CELEBRATION FOR THE GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY



The School of Greek Language and Culture participated in the Celebration for Greek Independence Day on Sunday, March 24th at Saint John's Hall.

Our school responded to the kind invitation of the Parish Council of Saint John and a significant number of our students and their parents as long as with their teachers Mr. Yanni Giavaras, Mrs. Katerina Nakou, and Mrs. Hrysa Kapnogianni participated in the celebration.

Our students performed three patriotic songs and the

Kindergarten student Antonia Bohler recited a nice poem for the day.

The director of the school, Mr. Giavaras, he wished for the National Day of Greece and he thanked Mr. Michali Halikoutaki, Mr. John Zelati, and the General Consul of Greece Mr. Louka Tsoko for their support to the Greek School.

Also, he talked about the importance of the Greek Language and he invited the Greek families to register their children to the Greek School.





# SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

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

Our Sunday School topics for the month of March were The Prodigal Son, The Last Judgement, Forgiveness Sunday, Icons/Sunday of Orthodoxy (1st Sunday of Lent), and Being a Good Friend - The Paralytic (Second Sunday of Lent).

YOUTH SUNDAY took place on March 3rd. We need to thank our children, who are singing more beautifully than ever and learning more church hymns under the direction of Maria Xenick. Our Epistle reader, Kaitlin Zelatis, was also amazing.



Our St. John Oratorical Festival took place of March 10th. Congratulations to the following students who are moving on the the next level in April. Kaitlin Zelatis will represent us for the senior division. Vasilios Panos and Kenny Kane are representing us in the junior division.

Our Pre-Lenten Retreat took place on March 17th. Our lessons included Forgiveness Sunday, Holy Unction, the Lenten Calendar and St. Ephraim's Prayer. Afterwards we all gathered in the church for a talk with Fr. Stavros and a prayer.



We would like to thank all the families who brought a Lenten meal to share at our Pre-Sanctified dinner on Wednesday, MARCH 20th. The food was delicious and our many parishioners in attendance were very grateful. We can always count on our parents when we need them.

Our Altar Boys, Myrhh Bearers, and Maiden for the Bridegroom Services are preparing and excited for their roles during HOLY WEEK. Everyone is also looking forward to our Sunday School Good Friday Retreat on May 3rd.

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

## APRIL CALENDAR:

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Sunday, April 7th:    | TOPIC: Holy Cross (3rd Sunday of Lent)<br>7th - 12th Stay in Church                                       |
| Sunday, April 14th:   | TOPIC: Faith (4th Sunday of Lent)   |
| Sunday, April 21st:   | TOPIC: Holy Week – 5th Sunday of Great Lent)<br>YOUTH SUNDAY  |
| Saturday, April 27th: | Saturday of Lazarus Service - Preparing of gifts on the Solea at 9:45. Breakfast and making of the palms. |
| Sunday, April 28th:   | TOPIC: Holy Week – Palm Sunday - ALL STUDENTS will participate in the Palm Sunday Procession              |
| Friday, May 3rd:      | Good Friday Retreat   |
| Sunday, May 5th:      | PASCHA – No Sunday School   |



## SUNDAY SCHOOL PRE-LENTEN RETREAT





# SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY



Sunday of Orthodoxy - March 24, 2024 - Icon Procession



# GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY



On Sunday, March 24th, we had our annual Greek Independence Day Luncheon & Program. Thank you to Ms. Magdalini Myer, Mrs. Maraquette Edquid and Mr. Yiannis Giavaras for their continuous efforts to continue our Greek Culture, and the Y Hara Mas Dancers, Students of the Children's and Adult Greek School for their inspiring program. Special Thank You to the Parish Council for providing lunch, Tara Swartzbaugh and the St. John Choir for leading the National Anthems and Ourania Stephanides and Haritini Andre for the beautiful decorations.



# COMMUNITY OUTREACH

## **Love thy Neighbor through our Monthly Community Outreach**

We have the privilege to help serve the needs of our homeless community in East Tampa on the 3rd Saturday of each month. We partner with Matthew 25 (a local Charity), Metropolitan Ministries and USF to serve breakfast, provide clothing and medical needs for our guests.

**Our next date (s) are April 20th & May 18th .**

**What to expect:** A rewarding experience and we welcome new volunteers!

**To Volunteer:** [ClickHere](#) (Link also below) or scan our QR code to access our Signup Genius -

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0F48A5A62DA3F49-community1/8067245#/>



**Place:** *Tampa Hope @ 3704 E. 3rd Ave.—Tampa East*      **Time:** *8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.*

**Questions on Arrival:** Look for Matthew 25 founders, Peggy & Mike Kanter or Greg & Victoria Melton, our dedicated parishioners that organize this ministry. They can help answer any questions or if you need direction when you arrive.

**You may also call Greg directly at 813-967-2074.**

*‘Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men’ Colossians 3:23*



# VETERANS/1ST RESPONDERS



## **BED SHEETS AND BATH/HAND TOWELS NEEDED FOR HOMELESS AND VETERANS AT ‘TAMPA HOPE’**

The ‘Community Outreach’ and ‘Veterans/1st Responders Ministries’ are co-sponsoring a drive in April for the “Tampa Hope Homeless Shelter” on 3704 East 3rd Avenue in Tampa. There is an urgent need for bath and hand towels as well as bed sheets for a single bed. These items can be new or gently worn.

This is an excellent opportunity during our Lenten journey to demonstrate our love for our brothers and sisters in need. By so doing, we will fulfill the Lord’s words in Matthew 25:40: “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me!”

Please drop your items in the container in the Church Hall anytime during the month of April. We thank you in advance for your generous donation!



# FOOD PANTRY UPDATE

**Thank YOU for YOUR ongoing Donations to the St. John Food Pantry.** We finished the year strong and have been able to provide bags of groceries to many families in need, supply Metropolitan Ministries with monthly donations, help the Children's Home in addition to local needs within our community!

~We appreciate the ongoing support ~

**For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Matthew 25:35**

Every little bit helps! One donation at a time YOU can help us help OTHERS to tackle hunger in our community! It's as easy as 1,2,3 ...

- 1) *Look for our dedicated drop off location just past the entrance area of the Church Hall.*
- 2) *Mark your calendars for the First Sunday of Each Month as our primary collection day (but donations are welcome anytime).*
- 3) *When you attend a Ministry Meeting bring a food item from the list below.*

Lastly, we accept grocery store gift cards in the church office.

Thank you for your support and thinking of the St. John Food Pantry one item at a time! If you have any questions or know of someone in need (we can create meals in a bag to go) please contact Sandra Pappas at 813-785-3747



## **Requested Food Pantry Items (Please be mindful of expiration dates)**

- Canned Fruits and Vegetables
- Canned or Dried Beans
- Canned Meat (including Vienna sausage, spam, chicken, and tuna)
- Cereal / Boxes of Milk
- Granola / Bars
- Instant Mashed Potatoes
- Jell-O/Pudding
- Macaroni & Cheese
- Oatmeal
- Pasta & Ramen Noodles
- Peanut butter & Jelly (in plastic jars)
- Soup – Cans or Ready to Go, Ravioli, Pasta (just add water) meals
- Spaghetti Sauce – (no glass)
- Dry Goods
- Paper Towels/Toilet Paper



# STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

**“You are the LIGHT of the world” Matthew 5:1**

Our heartfelt thanks to the loyal Stewards of St. John for your gifts to our parish....

On behalf of the Stewardship Committee, we wish everyone a blessed Lenten journey. There will be many opportunities for us to worship together this season. We hope to see everyone take advantage of the many beautiful services Father Stavros offers for all of us.

We are off to a good start in 2024. As of March 1st, 193 families have returned their Stewardship forms, and another 58 have contributed without turning in a form. That's 251 total families and individuals who have answered the call, resulting in \$449,972 given so far. Please let us hear from you today, if you haven't submitted your pledge form.

It is always best to include a Stewardship form along with your gift to our church. It is required every year per our current bylaws to be considered “a member in good standing”. They are available in the church office, church narthex, in the bookstore or online.

Please take the time to reflect on what you and your families can offer in Time, Talent and Treasure. All of us together make a huge impact on our church and community.

Please feel free to contact The Stewardship Committee at 813-748-1220 if you any questions or comments that you would like to share. We return ALL voice messages or texts, promise.

~The Stewardship Committee~

## 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**



# TWELVE DISCIPLES PROJECT

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

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

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.

"Prayer is doxology, praise, thanksgiving, confession, supplication, and intercession to God. 'When I prayed I was new,' wrote a great theologian of Christian antiquity, 'but when I stopped praying I became old.' Prayer is the way to renewal and spiritual life. Prayer is aliveness to God. Prayer is strength, refreshment, and joy. Through the grace of God and our disciplined efforts prayer lifts us up from our isolation to a conscious, loving communion with God in which everything is experienced in a new light. Prayer becomes a personal dialogue with God, a spiritual breathing of the soul, a foretaste of the bliss of God's kingdom." <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-fruits-of-true-prayer?inheritRedirect=true>

"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](https://www.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 or 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.

**Mathew Balasis led this ministry since it inception in 2020. With his recent passing, we are looking for someone to direct this ministry and hope to fill this in the next month. Memory Eternal Mathew!**

Participation will warm your spiritual heart.



## Why a Criminal Could Not Pray the "Jesus Prayer" Even One Time

I heard a beautiful story last week. True story. A parish priest had a man come to him, wanting to join the parish. He had been a criminal and spent time in prison, but was repentant and determined to redeem the remainder of his life.

But he had a hard time keeping a prayer rule. The priest kept reducing it: "Can you say fifty Jesus Prayers?" (the ancient prayer that goes "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.") "Well, can you at least say Twenty-five? How about ten?"

Then the man came down with cancer, and the priest visited him in the hospital in his closing days. He asked him, "Well, were you able to say those ten Jesus Prayers?"

The man looked sad and said, "No, Father, I didn't."

"Did you say five?"

"No, not even five."

"Well, did you at least say one?"

"No, Father."

"Why not?"

"I can't get past Jesus."

The man said that, when he began with "Lord," he was overwhelmed with the majesty and glory of God, how he created all the universe, from the largest star to the smallest detail. Then, when he said "Jesus," he was again seized with wonder, to think that this Lord of Creation became a human being, a man with the name "Jesus."

And those two words were enough to ponder for a lifetime. He just couldn't get any further.



FMS

# PHILOPTOCHOS APRIL NEWS

## PALM SUNDAY BAKESALE

**Saturday April 27 & Sunday April 28 after Liturgy**

Spanakopita triangles & 2 lb. pan  
Tiropita triangles  
Tsoureki  
Baklava 8x8 pan  
Koulourakia  
Sugar Mama Pascha Cookies

Sales are day of. No pre-orders. Questions contact Lisa Alsina 813-728-1094

## PALM SUNDAY LUNCHEON

Annual Community Palm Sunday Luncheon  
**Sunday April 28**

Let's break bread together as we begin our journey through Holy Week.

Traditional fried fish lunch.

All proceeds from the luncheon and bake sale support our many parish, community and national charitable causes.

## THANK YOU!

Thank you for your generous support of our Souper Bowl of Caring luncheon. Everyone enjoyed delicious soups and salads, and we were able to raise close to \$1000 for Autism causes. Thank you Ourania Stephanides - Chair

We appreciate your generous support of our OCMC coffee as well! Thank-you Kalliope Chagaris-Chair.

## SAVE THE DATE

April 14th  
General Membership  
Meeting after church

April 17th  
Our turn to host the Pre-  
Sanctified Liturgy Dinner



## Donations Needed for Great Lent and Holy Week

Great Lent begins March 18. We have many special celebrations during these weeks. We know that many of you would like to contribute to the decorating of our church and icons during this period. For your convenience, below is a list of items needed for the celebration of the Sacred Services of Lent and Holy Week. Please contact the church office to reserve your desired offering for the health of your loved ones or in memory of a deceased loved one.

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

|                  |   |   |               |
|------------------|---|---|---------------|
| <b>Lent</b>      | Wireless Microphones in the Church          | Duracell or Energizer AA Batteries          | Many          |
| <b>April 5</b>   | Salutations to the Virgin Mary - 3rd Stanza | Flowers for Icon of Panagia                 | \$125         |
| <b>April 7</b>   | Veneration of the Holy Cross                | Flowers for Tray for Procession             | \$500         |
| <b>April 12</b>  | Salutations to the Virgin Mary - 4th Stanza | Flowers for Icon of Panagia                 | \$125         |
| <b>April 19</b>  | Akathist Hymn                               | Flowers for Icon of Panagia                 | \$125         |
| <b>April 28</b>  | Palm Sunday                                 | Flowers for Icon of Palm Sunday             | \$125         |
|                  |   | Palms Strips & Branches                     | \$300 total   |
| <b>Holy Week</b> |   | Pillar Candles for Windows (20)             | \$20 each     |
| <b>April 28</b>  | Palm Sunday                                 | Flowers for Icon of Bridegroom in Narthex   | \$125         |
|                  | Bridegroom Service                          | Flowers for Icon of Bridegroom on Solea (2) | \$125 each    |
| <b>May 1</b>     | Holy Wednesday                              | Flowers for Icon of Last Supper             | \$125         |
|                  | Holy Unction                                | Olive Oil, Flour, Prosphora (2)             | Donations     |
| <b>May 2</b>     | Holy Thursday                               | Flowers for Icon of Crucifixion             | \$125         |
|                  |   | Wreaths for Bottom of Cross (2)             | \$200 each    |
|                  |   | Wreath for Top of Cross                     | \$300         |
|                  |   | Scattered flowers at base of cross          | \$75          |
|                  |   | Candles for Top of Cross (3)                | \$20 each     |
| <b>May 3</b>     | Good Friday                                 | 16 Bags of Rose Petals for Myrrh-bearers    | \$125         |
|                  |   | Flowers for Epitaphios                      | Several       |
|                  |   | Candles for Top of Cross (3)-Apokathelosis  | \$20 each     |
|                  |   | Candles for Top of Cross (3)-Lamentations   | \$20 each     |
|                  |   | Icon of Extreme Humility                    | \$125         |
| <b>May 5</b>     | Pascha                                      | Flowers for Icon of Resurrection            | \$125         |
|                  |   | Flowers for Icon of Empty Tomb              | \$125         |
|                  |   | Silk Flower for Royal Doors                 | \$125         |
|                  |   | Easter Lilies                               | \$30 per Lily |



# Church Etiquette by Fr. Stavros

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

## **Some General Thoughts**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Strapless dresses**—in monasteries, women must have their heads covered in church. In our church, we only ask for the shoulders. A three inch wide strap is appropriate. Less than that is not. We should put on our Sunday best for church. If the best at your disposal is blue jeans, then come in blue jeans. But don't opt for blue jeans if you have other attire. If the best you have is a T-shirt, then do not stay away. But if you own a polo shirt or a button down shirt, or a coat and tie, then come at your best.

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

## **Arriving at church**

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

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

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

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

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

While in Church

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

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

## **When do I make the sign of the cross?**

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

### **These include:**

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

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

At the Small Entrance: “Come let us worship and bow down” make a slight bow.

“Let us lift up our hearts:” Look upwards to Christ in the dome and lift up your hands.

“Let us bow our heads to the Lord:” Pretty self-explanatory, bow your head to the Lord.

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

### **Kneeling**

Put the kneelers up and down quietly.

### **Kissing the hand of the priest**

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

### **For Holy Communion:**

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

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

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

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

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



*Proverbs 16:3—Commit your work to the Lord; and your plans will be established.*

*Psalms 37:5—Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him, and He will act.*



*Our word for this year for our parish is the word “Commit.” To commit means to do something. For instance, to commit a crime is to do something that is against the law. To commit to an exercise program requires action. To commit to the Lord also requires us to do something. It is more than an identity than an identity as a Christian, it is certainly more than a feeling. To commit to the Lord is an action, it requires us to do something.*

*There are two things to “commit” to this month—First, commit to the Lenten journey, come to an extra service each week, or come to one Compline, one Pre-Sanctified Liturgy and one Salutations for the entire Lent. Commit to extra worship. The second thing to commit to is the Holy Week journey—commit the evenings to worship, which is not only worship but relearning and reliving the things we believe in. The idea of the Lent and Holy Week journey is to lead us to re-commit ourselves to Christ and living a Christ-centered life.*



# Community News

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

**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 Epistle of First and Second Peter. For April, the dates are April 2, 9, 16 and 23.

**Tuesday night Bible study with Fr. John**—will continue meeting at 6:30 p.m. on most Tuesday 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 April, the dates are April 2, 9, 16 and 23.

**GOYA Meeting for April**-The April GOYA Meeting will be Sunday, April 21 from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

**GOYA Lenten Retreat**-Our 19th Annual GOYA Lenten Retreat will be held from April 5-7 at the Mary Help of Christians conference center in East Tampa. GOYAns from around the area will join us for the retreat. They will also be joining us for worship on Sunday, April 7.

**Young Adults**- Our young adult group meets once a month for dinner/discussion (and other times for fellowship and service). The meeting for April be on Monday, April 8 from 6:30-9:00 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. All young adults, ages 18-40, are invited to participate. The Topic for April will be "Spiritual Renewal". Group Members use What's App for communication. Please contact Aris Rogers to be added to our what's app for young adults at 813-309-5525.

**TWEENS- Friday, April 26** - JOY Tweens will have its last movie night of this school year. Please keep a look-out for more information by email, text messages, weekly church bulletins and Sunday school flyers.

**Men's Group**- Our men's group will meet on Sunday, April 14 from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Any men of our community are welcome to join us for dinner, discussion. We meet at 5:00 p.m., walk to a local restaurant and get some food, then bring it back to the hall where we eat and have a discussion. Our topic for April will be "The Journey of Great and Holy Week."

**Fr. Stavros out of town April 12-13**-Fr. Stavros will be out of town Friday, April 12 (following Pre-Sanctified Liturgy) through Saturday evening April 13, returning in time for Divine Liturgy on Sunday, April 14.

***Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ~Matthew 11:28***

"...People feel unhappy and they don't know why. They feel that something is wrong, but they can't put their finger on what. They feel uneasy, confused, frustrated, alienated and estranged – and they can't explain it. They have everything and yet they want more; and when they get it, they are still empty and dissatisfied. They want fulfillment and it never seems to come. Everything is fine and yet everything is wrong...

...Here in America, this is almost a national disease. It is covered over by frantic activity and endless running around; it is buried in activities and events; it is drowned out by television programs and football games. But when the movement stops and the dial is turned off and everything is quiet... then the dread sets in, the meaninglessness of it all, the boredom and the fear...

...St. Augustine said more than 1500 years ago, "and we will be forever restless until we rest in Him." Our lives are made for God and we will be unsatisfied, unfulfilled and frustrated until we find our home with Him. Nothing in this fallen world can, of itself, bring us the peace that we seek. God alone can do that because He alone is our home. And we are His..."

—Fr Thomas Hopko, "The Lenten Spring"



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



## Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

**Over 4,097 people have!** The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 6 years! Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email Vasili at Vasili@stjohntpa.org and ask him to add you. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email Vasili or follow the link at the bottom of the daily emails to do so. If you want to forward to a friend, please use the "forward to a friend" option. Also, make sure prayerteam365@gmail.com has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.

**The Prayer Team has a new dedicated website: PrayerTeam365.com**

**Check it out! Search by topic and grow in your faith today!**

## 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.

HE CRIED  
 HE KNEW LAZARUS  
 WAS DEAD BEFORE HE GOT THE NEWS  
 BUT STILL, HE CRIED  
 HE KNEW LAZARUS WOULD BE ALIVE AGAIN IN MOMENTS  
 BUT STILL, HE CRIED  
 HE KNEW DEATH HERE IS NOT FOREVER  
 HE KNEW ETERNITY AND THE KINGDOM BETTER THAN  
 ANYONE ELSE COULD  
 YET HE WEPT  
 BECAUSE THIS WORLD IS FULL OF PAIN AND REGRET AND  
 LOSS AND DEPRESSION AND DEVASTATION  
 HE WEPT BECAUSE KNOWING THE END OF THE STORY DOESN'T  
 MEAN YOU CAN'T CRY AT THE SAD PARTS.

## Have questions?

Just need to talk? Worried? Sad? Happy?

We are here for you!



Fr. Stavros  
 < 813-394-1038

Fr. John  
 678-637-4425 >



## 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.

# Inspiration

The serpent did not tempt Adam and Eve to steal, to commit adultery, or to kill. He simply tempted them to question God's word and to do as they wished.



Jesus said "I came down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent me." (John 6:38) His whole life was devoted to obeying His Father; yet it was not always easy for Him. What made it possible for Him was His great love for the Father. It's the same with us. If we love God, it will be evident in our obedience.



We have to go to Liturgy, even if we stand there like stumps. Some will say: "I'm not how I should be. I don't understand any of it. My mind can't concentrate there." But go, no matter what. One elder said: "When you stop into a perfume store, your clothes smell fragrant after you leave, even if you didn't buy anything." This is what happens, he says, when you go to Liturgy.



Maybe you won't be able to do anything spiritual, but even the fact that you went, that you stood there like a stump—that's already something. So tell yourself: "I'll go as I am—an unhewn log. After all, God knows how to hone down the unhewn log." And if you don't go because you say, "I can't, I can't concentrate," then everything will get worse and worse, and you'll never get better.

I will never get tired of saying "Thank You God" because He never gets tired of blessing me.



It's not what you're made of ~

It's how you choose to use what you've got ☘

For example (this pic) =



"This is a 1000 gram iron bar. It's raw value is around \$100.

If you decide to make horseshoes, its value would increase to \$250.

If, instead, you decided to make sewing needles, the value would increase to about \$70,000.

If you decided to produce watch springs and gears, the value would increase to about \$6 Million.

However still, if you decided to manufacture precision laser components out of it like ones used in lithography, it'll be worth \$15 Million.

Your value is not just what you are made of - but above all -in what ways you can make the best of who you are. "



# Women's Retreat

Women's Retreat Sponsored by St. John Philoptochos - March 23, 2024  
Over 70 Women Attended!





# YOUNG AT HEART



## Young at Heart Remembers Departed on Saturday of the Souls

On Saturday, March 9th the members of our Young at Heart family spent a wonderful morning and afternoon worshipping and visiting together. We started the day with Divine Liturgy and a Memorial Service for Saturday of the Souls. Afterwards we shared koliva and a delicious brunch. We concluded with a video presentation and discussion on the "The Last Judgment" led by Fr. John.



## Young at Heart April Gathering

Saturday, April 13th  
Social - 11:30 a.m.

Lenten Potluck Luncheon - Noon

Presentation: St. John Climacus - The Ladder of Divine Ascent

Contact Presvytera Denise no later than April 7th with number attending and dish you will bring to share at the potluck

## Young at Heart Visit to Panagia Monastery



Saturday, May 18th  
9 am to 4 pm

Join us on a bus trip to Panagia Vlahernon Monastery and Annunciation of the Theotokos Greek Orthodox Monasteries located near Ocala. Visit both the men's and women's monasteries, offer a prayer in their churches, shop their bookstores, and enjoy quiet time in a blessed and peaceful location.

Cost - \$20 per person due at time of reservation - space extremely limited!

See Presvytera Denise for availability



# April is National Stress Awareness Month

## Nursing Ministry



April is recognized as **National Stress Awareness Month** to bring attention to the negative impact of stress.

### What is stress?

Stress is the physical or mental response to an external cause. Stress is a natural reaction to difficult situations in life, such as work, family, relationships, and money problems. A stressor may be a one-time or short-term occurrence, or it can happen repeatedly over a long time. Stress symptoms can affect your body, your thoughts, feelings, and your behavior. Knowing common stress symptoms can help you manage them. Stress that's not dealt with can lead to many health problems, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, obesity, and diabetes. Managing stress is an essential component for a healthy lifestyle. Knowing how to manage stress can improve mental and physical well-being as well as minimize exacerbation of health-related issues. Stress that's not dealt with can lead to negative effects on your body.

### What causes stress?

As mentioned, stress is a natural reaction to difficult situations in life. family, All sorts of situations can cause stress. Some causes of stress can be caused by major life events such as divorce, unemployment, aging parents, moving, bereavement, or by a series of minor irritations such as feeling undervalued at work or arguing with a family member. Sometimes, there are no obvious causes.

### Physical signs of stress

As a result, you may experience headaches, muscle tension, pain, nausea, indigestion, dizziness, insomnia, anxiety, and depression. You may also breathe more quickly, have heart palpitations, or suffer from various aches and pains. In the long term, you may be putting yourself at risk of heart attacks and strokes.

### How to manage stress

If you have stress symptoms, taking steps to manage your stress can have many health benefits. Possible stress management tips:

- Go to church.
- Get regular physical activity.
- Practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, yoga, tai chi, or massage.
- Keep a sense of humor.
- Spend time with family and friends.
- Set aside time for hobbies. Read a book, listen to music, or go for a walk.
- Schedule time for selfcare.
- Write in a journal.
- Get enough sleep.
- Eat a healthy balanced diet.
- Stay away from tobacco, alcohol, and use of illegal substances.

### When to ask for help

If you're not sure stress is the cause, or if you've taken steps to control your stress but you keep having symptoms, see your health care provider. Your health care provider may want to check for other potential causes. Or think about seeing a counselor or therapist, who can help you find the sources of your stress and learn new coping tools. And if you are concerned about harming yourself, call 911 or a suicide hotline. Also, get emergency help right away if you have chest pain, especially if you also have shortness of breath; jaw, back, shoulder or arm pain; sweating; dizziness; or nausea. These may be warning signs of a heart attack and not simply stress symptoms.

# St. John's Bookstore



*Our bookstore has stocked many of the items you will need in preparation for Pascha.*

*Available now are:*

**Holy Week Service Books**  
**Red egg dye imported from Greece**  
**Books with meditations and readings for Pascha**  
**Resurrection Icons**  
**Greeting cards and Children's books**

## Father Stavros has authored 8 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

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

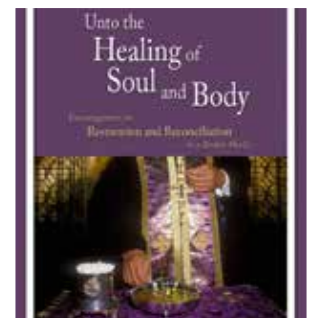
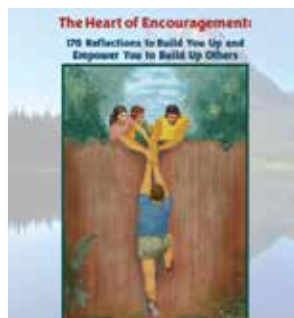
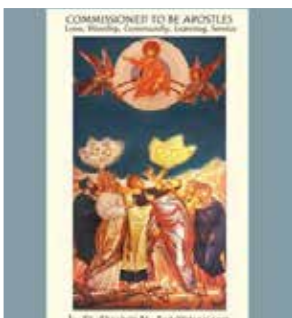
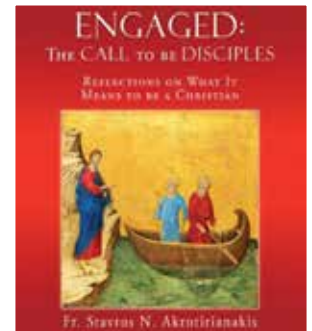
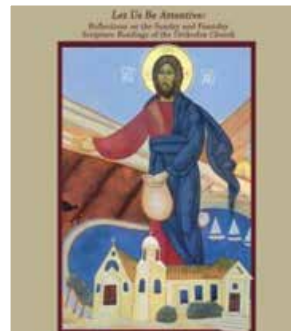
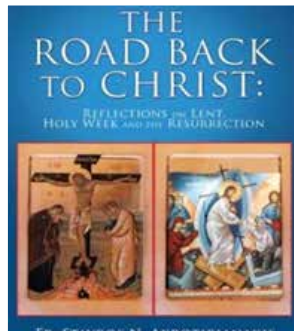
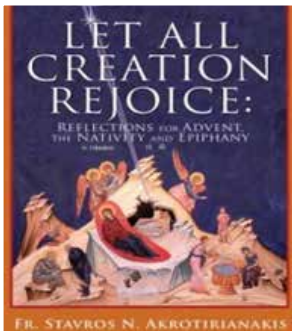
Engaged: The Call To Be Disciples, Reflections on What it Means to be a Christian

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**



# Some Guidance For Those With Small Children

*We love that there are so many children at St. John the Baptist. Please use discretion and common sense when it comes to taking them out when they become fussy. As Lent and Holy Week services are long and run late, for those who bring small children to the services, please sit near either the side door or in the back and if your child becomes fussy, please take them outside for a few minutes.*

The services of Great Lent and Holy Week are solemn, and are supposed to offer time for quiet reflection. There is a fine line for how to do this correctly. We want to embrace all of our children. We also want to have a quiet environment for people to escape the “noise” of the world. Here are a few suggestions:

1. There are some services that are very kid friendly—they are shorter, familiar, or earlier in the day.
  - Saturday of Lazarus—morning Liturgy
  - Palm Sunday morning—morning Liturgy and fun procession where kids get to carry palms
  - Holy Wednesday afternoon—Holy Unction at 3:00 p.m.  
This service is usually pretty loud. The evening one is more quiet.
  - Good Friday afternoon—Vespers of the Descent from the cross at 3:00 p.m.  
This service lasts an hour and all the kids get to be part of the procession.
  - Holy Saturday morning—Divine Liturgy at 8:30 a.m. Around 9:15 a.m. the priest throws leaves all over the church. Young kids love this. They are free to bring bags and collect leaves to take home.
  - Pascha morning—Agape Vespers at 11:00 a.m. This service lasts about an hour, and there is an Easter Egg hunt at the end.
2. Bring something for your kids to do—it’s fine if they read a book quietly, or color in a book quietly. No loud toys or things that they can bang on the pews.
3. A small snack is okay, like Cherrios. Just please make sure you clean up if any spill.
4. Leave early if you need to. If your small child is not used to coming to church, come for shorter periods of time, like 30 minutes, then work your way up to 45, an hour, the whole service. For these evening services of Holy Week, for instance Holy Thursday night, stay until the procession of the Cross and then leave.
5. Talk to your child about what they will be experiencing. Tell them it is going to be dark, and quiet, and people will be sad because of the crucifixion, etc. Read about the services and explain to them what is going to happen. Explain to them what Holy Unction is and that it doesn’t hurt to be anointed. For some reason, kids think the q-tip is a needle and that anointing is like getting inoculated.
6. If they are being verbal when the priest is reading or preaching, please step out for a few minutes. If a child is crying while singing is going on, it almost seems to blend in. That’s because many voices are singing and the child’s cry hopefully gets lost in the many voices. When it is only the one voice of the priest reading the Gospel or offering a sermon, one screaming child beats one talking priest.
7. Some days you are just going to lose, and that’s okay. There will probably be one or two or three times in a child’s life where they are just going to have a bad day, and worship will just be impossible. It’s going to happen, it happens with the best of parents and best of kids and best of intentions. So if you have to just leave a few times and say “I lost today,” that’s okay. Play for the long game.
8. Remember that they won’t be small forever. Bringing them fosters familiarity and enjoyment of worship. If you can’t do it exactly the way you want to, do as best you can. Play for the long game. This is meant to be helpful and encouraging so hopefully it is received in this manner. We like small children worshipping, they are a sign that the church has a future. Just use some discretion so that the experience is pleasant for everyone in the church. Please let me know if you have any questions.

+Fr. Stavros



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

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

## **Some people come sporadically.**

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

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

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

## **Church is important. Why?**

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

## **Church is important because:**

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

Communion.

- It unites us with the saints, the holy ones of God; and also with those in our family who have passed away, since we pray for the departed in our services.

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

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

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

**JUST START COMING!!!**

## **When is a good time to come back?**

**ANY TIME, BUT ESPECIALLY DURING LENT**

## **But what if I'm mad at someone?**

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

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

*Make an appointment to meet with Fr. Stavros.*

**SEE YOU IN CHURCH!!!**

**PLEASE COME BACK!**

# Follow Us on Social Media



# St. John the Baptist



Let's Get Connected for Our Latest News & Updates



on Flickr

@<https://www.flickr.com/photos/stjohngoctampa>



on Facebook

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



on Instagram @stjohntpa

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

2418 W. Swann Avenue  
Tampa, FL 33609

(813)876-8830

## St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

### Have you downloaded our App?

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

### Do you Like our Facebook page?

 Like our page and suggest it to your friends.

Announcements are posted frequently so you are up to date with everything going on at St. John the Baptist. You can find our page at StJohnGOCTampa.

### Live Streaming

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

To access this page

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

All of the services are available to watch at anytime.



## 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.**

## 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 unaware.*  
HEBREWS 13:2

## Youth Protection Program Reminder



GREEK ORTHODOX  
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

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

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

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

## Thank You to all of Our Friends!

**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.**



## April 2024

| Sun  | Mon   | Tue   | Wed  | Thu   | Fri  | Sat  |
|--|---|---|--|---|--|--|
| <b>**Fast Day</b>  | <b>1**</b>  | <b>2**</b><br>Women's Bible Study<br>10:00 a.m.<br>Compline 5:30 p.m.<br>Bible Study 6:30 p.m.  | <b>3**</b> 9 <sup>th</sup> Hour 5:30 p.m.<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy<br>6:00 p.m.<br>Lenten Dinner/Discussion<br>(AHEPA/daughters)                      | <b>4**</b><br>Choir Practice  | <b>5**</b> 9 <sup>th</sup> Hour 9:30 a.m.<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy<br>10:00 a.m.<br>Salutations 6:30 p.m.<br>GOYA Lenten Retreat  | <b>6**</b><br>GOYA Lenten Retreat<br>Children's Greek School   |
| <b>7**</b> Orthros 8:30 a.m.<br>Liturgy 9:45 a.m.  | <b>8**</b><br>Young Adult Discussion  | <b>9**</b><br>women's Bible Study 10:00<br>a.m.<br>Compline 5:30 p.m.<br>Bible Study 6:30 p.m.<br>Vision meeting 6:30 p.m.                      | <b>10**</b> 9 <sup>th</sup> Hour 5:30 p.m.<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy<br>6:00 p.m.<br>Lenten Dinner/Discussion-<br>(Young at Heart/Welcome<br>Ministry) | <b>11**</b><br>Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30<br>p.m.<br>Choir Practice | <b>12**</b><br>9 <sup>th</sup> Hour 9:30 a.m.<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy<br>10:00 a.m.<br>Salutations 6:30 p.m.                     | <b>13**</b><br>Children's Greek School<br>Young at Heart   |
| <b>14**</b> Orthros 8:30 a.m.<br>Liturgy 9:45 a.m.<br>Philoptochos meeting<br>Men's Group 5:00 p.m.  | <b>15**</b>   | <b>16**</b> Fr. - Dentist 8:00 a.m.<br>Women's Bible Study<br>10:00 a.m.<br>Compline 5:30 p.m.<br>Bible Study 6:30 p.m.<br>PC meeting 6:30 p.m. | <b>17**</b> 9 <sup>th</sup> Hour 5:30 p.m.<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy<br>6:00 p.m.<br>Lenten Dinner/Discussion<br>(Philoptochos)                        | <b>18**</b><br>Choir Practice   | <b>19**</b> 9 <sup>th</sup> Hour 9:30 a.m.<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 10:00<br>a.m.<br>Akathist Hymn 6:30 p.m.<br>Liturgy 8:15 p.m. | <b>20**</b> Community Outreach<br>Children's Greek School  |
| <b>21**</b> Orthros 8:30 a.m.<br>Liturgy 9:45 a.m.<br>Youth Sunday<br>GOYA 5:00 p.m.   | <b>22**</b>   | <b>23**</b> Women's Bible Study<br>10:00 a.m.<br>Compline 5:30 p.m.<br>Bible Study 6:30 p.m.<br>Vision meeting 6:30 p.m.                        | <b>24**</b> 9 <sup>th</sup> Hour 5:30 p.m.<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy<br>6:00 p.m.<br>Lenten Dinner/Discussion<br>(Bible Study/Young Adults)            | <b>25**</b><br>Adult Greek School<br>6:00-8:30 p.m.<br>Choir Practice | <b>26**</b> 9 <sup>th</sup> Hour 9:30 a.m.<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy<br>10:00 a.m.<br>Tweens movie night                           | <b>27**</b> Saturday of Lazarus<br>Orthros 8:30 a.m.<br>Proskomide 9:30 a.m.<br>Liturgy 10:00 a.m.<br>Philoptochos Bake Sale |
| <b>28**</b> Palm Sunday<br>Orthros 8:30 a.m.<br>Liturgy 9:45 a.m.<br>Philoptochos Luncheon<br>Philoptochos Bake Sale<br>Vespers 5:00 p.m.<br>Bridegroom Service<br>6:30 p.m. | <b>29**</b> Holy Monday<br>9 <sup>th</sup> Hour 9:00 a.m.<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy<br>9:30 a.m.<br>Bridegroom Service<br>6:30 p.m. | <b>30**</b> Holy Tuesday<br>9 <sup>th</sup> Hour 9:00 a.m.<br>Pre-Sanctified Liturgy<br>9:30 a.m.<br>Bridegroom Service<br>6:30 p.m.            |  |   |  |  |

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**As it is written in Isaiah, "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**