



# ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

## GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

# THE MESSENGER

**CHRIST IS  
BORN!**

*DECEMBER 2024*

**GLORIFY  
HIM!**



*NATIVITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST — DECEMBER 25*

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

*Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople \*Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America\* Metropolis of Atlanta*



### 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

Sundays: Orthros 8:45 a.m.    Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.    Weekdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.    Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

<b>Parish Priest</b> Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-876-8830 (Office)    813-394-1038 (Cell) frstav@gmail.com		<b>Bible Study-Tuesday Night</b> Fr. John Stefero    678-637-4425		<b>Junior Olympics</b> Dwight Forde    561-310-5034	
<b>Retired Priest in Residence</b> Rev. Fr. Stratton Dorozenski 813-876-8830 (Office)		<b>Buildings &amp; Grounds</b> Euripides Panos    813-352-3972		<b>Men's Fellowship</b> Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038	
<b>Retired Priest in Residence</b> Rev. Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830 (Office)    678-637-4425 (Cell) jwstefero50@hotmail.com		<b>Choir</b> Tara Swartzbaugh, Director    813-313-0439 Ruth Losovitz, Organist    727-688-2782 Maria Xenick, Chanter    813-765-3587		<b>Parish Nursing Ministry</b> Marcelle Triantafilou    612-396-5026	
<b>Ministry Coordinator/Chanter</b> Maria Xenick Mariapxenick@stjohntpa.org 813-765-3587 (Cell)		<b>College Student Program</b> Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis    813-394-1038		<b>Oratorical Festival</b> Peggy Bradshaw    727-244-1374	
<b>Parish Council</b> Euripides (Rip) Panos, President    813-352-3972 Zohn Zelatis, Vice President    813-727-2271 Marilyn Sandborn, Secretary    813-760-6289 Alexis Scarfogliero, Treasurer    813-892-1599 George Ameres    941-720-3494 Peggy George    813-727-5587 Peter George    781-910-9971 Amin Hanhan    863-581-2430 Tony Magos    813-957-3206 Suzanne Pileggi    813-244-5855 Marcelle Triantafilou    612-396-5026		<b>Community Outreach</b> Greg Melton    813-967-2074		<b>Photography Ministry</b> Karina Findlay    813-476-9632	
		<b>Connect Through Christ - Special Needs Ministry for Children</b> Dante and Lindsey Skourellos    813-765-9534		<b>Philoptochos</b> Katherine Sakkis    813-309-1073	
		<b>Dance Groups</b> H XAPA MAΣ, Alexandra De Maio    813-340-9668 Maraquet Edquid    813-422-8963 IIAPEA, Marina Choundas    813-877-6136 IIANHΓYPI, Alexandra De Maio    813-340-9668		<b>Stewardship</b> Chris Kyrus    757-672-1920 George Mitseas    813-748-1220	
<b>Office Staff</b> Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper debbie@stjohntpa.org    813-443-4899(fax)		<b>Daughters of Penelope</b> Ourania Stephanides    813-546-4711		<b>Sunday School</b> Vickie Peckham    813-758-3102	
<b>Adopt a College Student</b> Kathy Kaburis    813-240-6513		<b>Festival</b> Mike Xenick    813-340-8737		<b>Usher</b> Pete Trakas    813-505-2193	
<b>Adult Greek School</b> Magda Myer    813-523-5771		<b>Finance Committee</b> Gary Ward    813-846-3898		<b>Veterans/1<sup>st</sup> Responders</b> Fr. John Stefero    813-876-8830	
<b>AHEPA</b> James Sakaris, President    301-529-8857		<b>Food Pantry</b> Sandra Pappas    813-785-3747		<b>Website / Social Media / APP VOLUNTEER NEEDED!</b>	
<b>Altar Angels</b> Kalliope Chagaris    813-789-4134		<b>Gasparilla Parking</b> Volunteer Needed		<b>Welcoming Ministry</b> Maria Xenick    813-765-3587	
<b>Altar Boys</b> Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis    813-394-1038		<b>GOYA</b> Michael & Bessie Palios    813-523-0346		<b>Women's Bible Study</b> Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038	
<b>Bookstore</b> Presbyteria Denise Stefero    678-464-4833		<b>Hope/Joy</b> George & Zackie Ameres    813-245-3813		<b>Young Adult</b> Aris Rogers    813-309-5525	
		<b>Joy Tweens</b> Maraquet Edquid    813-422-8963		<b>Young at Heart</b> Dora Morgan    813-613-3738	
				<b>Youth Protection</b> Suzanne Pileggi    813-244-5855	
				<b>12 Disciples 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 10<sup>th</sup> of each month.



# A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRIEST

## GIVING AND RECEIVING GIFTS

*And she gave birth to her first-born Son and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*  
Luke 2:7

In every Christmas pageant, including ours at St. John, Mary and Joseph are portrayed going to an inn, where they are turned away for lodging by the innkeeper. The Biblical account of the Nativity does not mention any such conversation. There is no innkeeper mentioned, no dialogue between the innkeeper and Mary and Joseph. The mention of there was no room for them “in the inn,” leads one to wonder if there was only one inn in Bethlehem. We don’t know. What we do know was that there was no suitable place for Mary to deliver the Incarnate Son of God, **save for in a manger**. His birth was the most humble of all. The Orthodox depiction of the Nativity is that it occurred in a cave (not a barn). At that time in history, animals were kept in caves. Symbolically, the cave was a natural occurrence, not something created. A barn, a stable, or an inn, would have been created by human hands. How appropriate that the Creator of the human hands took on flesh in a place He Himself had created, not something that we created.



St. John the Theologian, at the end of his Gospel, writes “But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” (John 21:25) The Bible doesn’t record every conversation that Jesus ever had. There is not much known about His childhood (though our traditions about His childhood come from the **Protevangelion of St. James**, an apocryphal Gospel that is not part of the canon of Scripture but is considered valid by Orthodox theologians). And so there likely was a frantic journey through Bethlehem for Mary and Joseph, looking for a place to stay, where Mary could safely deliver her Baby. There weren’t online bookings for hotels or reservations one could put on a credit card back then. Mary and Joseph were turned away by at least one, and probably more, innkeepers. What a desperate feeling this must have been as “the time came for her to be delivered.” (Luke 2:6)

Most of us are familiar with the accounts of the Nativity from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The Gospel of Luke recounts the visit of the shepherds while Matthew has the Magi. These are the accounts that are often melded together in traditional Christmas pageants and plays. The most succinct description of the Nativity comes from the Gospel of John 1. He begins the Gospel with these words:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.*

“Word” or “Logos” in Greek is one of the many names given to the second person of the Trinity—Jesus, Christ, Messiah, Savior, Word, Logos, Son of God, Son of Man, etc. So Jesus Christ, the Word, was in the beginning with God, and is God, part of the Holy Trinity. He participated in every step of Creation, nothing was made without Him.

**John 1:14** reads: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory as of the only Son from the Father.* The miracle of Christmas goes far deeper than a baby being born in a manger. The Word of God, the Son of God, took on flesh and became like one of us. This is why our feast day on December 25 is not called Christmas, but rather the Incarnation of the Son of God in the flesh, the day the Creator took on flesh and came to live in His creation.

*Imagine the gift that Christ gave to us. He left the majesty of heaven, where He had been for eternity. He left the throne from which He helped to create the heavens and the earth. He left the perfect state of Paradise and came down to the earth, a place infested with sin. He traded His throne for a manger in a cave. He traded majesty for humility. He traded His life for death on the cross.*

The Feast of the Incarnation is so amazing because it sets in motion the events leading to the eventual Crucifixion and Resurrection, and with them the possibility of our salvation. During Great Lent, we display an icon of the Extreme Humility of Christ, which shows Christ descending into the grave with the cross behind Him. The icon of the Nativity depicts a similar scene of humility, as Christ is surrounded by animals, and is visited by lowly shepherds. The “manger” in which He is laid is made to look like a coffin, and the swaddling clothes are actually burial bands in the icon. While society has made Christmas into a season of decorations, shopping, parties and honestly, quite a bit of stress, the Orthodox Tradition sees Christmas as a mind-blowing, awesome event, for which we prepare with reverence and solemnity. As we do with Pascha, we celebrate for a period of time once the feast has come, in the case of the Nativity, for twelve days. The days preceding Christmas are supposed to be days of awe, more than days of frivolity.

There is nothing wrong with celebrating in this season. I have always liked Christmas trees and Christmas lights. There are certain Christmas carols I enjoy hearing. However, the older I get, the more I desire to celebrate Christmas in a quiet and meaningful way, rather than in a commercial one. During a month when everything seems to speed up, I intentionally try to slow down, and one way I do this is by spending more time in worship. You’ll notice that our December calendar has more services than any other month outside of Lent and Holy Week. There are a lot of feast days on which the Divine Liturgy is traditionally celebrated in **December—St. Barbara (December 4), St. Nicholas (December 6), St. Anna (December 9), St. Spyridon (December 12)**. And at St. John, we’ve added more liturgical services, especially the week before the Nativity, to provide us with an opportunity to slow down. On **December 16**, we will have a Divine Liturgy at sunset. And on **December 20**, one at sunrise. There will be lots of opportunities to receive Christ this December in the sacrament of Holy Communion, which in a season of gift giving and gift receiving, is the ultimate gift we can receive, because it is the ultimate gift we have ever been given.

### **JESUS IS KNOCKING AT THE DOOR OF YOUR INN**

In a recent sermon, I questioned whether we ever put ourselves into the Bible stories, or if we ever wonder what it would have been like to be present in any of these accounts. What would it have felt like to be one of the Magi walking in the desert for two years, or a shepherd shivering on a mountainside. What would the multitude of angels have sounded like? How big was the cave?

**Revelation 3:20** says “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to Him.” A beautiful image depicts Jesus knocking on a door that has no doorknob. The door is the door to our inn, to our hearts. Jesus stands at the door and knocks. It is our choice to open the door or not. The greatest gift we can receive is Christ. We don’t have to wait until Christmas morning to open Him. We don’t have to wonder what surprise awaits in the wrapped box. The gift of Christ can be opened every day, and the gift is **love, joy, peace, wisdom, hope, purpose, forgiveness, salvation and so much more.**



Going back to the innkeeper, this is the role in which we find ourselves most often. And if we wonder what role in the annual Christmas pageant depicts us best, it is probably the role of the innkeeper. Each of us is an innkeeper who decides if there is room for Jesus—in our hearts, in our lives. We each decide if we will receive His gifts, or whether we will shut the door on them.

In early November (and for many months before), we survived the rancor of the elections. And immediately following, we have to survive the rancor of Christmas—the endless advertising, lines at the mall, traffic and stress. We don’t have to really imagine what life was like on the streets of Bethlehem at Christmas, because we are still living that today. It’s no wonder that the whole city missed out on the multitude of angels filling the night-time sky. They were too busy to notice. And we’re missing out on love, joy, peace, wisdom, hope, purpose, forgiveness and potentially salvation, because we are too loud and not still, because we are too busy and not focused, because we are focused on our own glory instead of God’s, because we can’t hear the knock at the door, or we can hear it and are too busy or afraid to open it.

**The best and most important gift we will receive this Christmas (and every day if we want to) is Christ.**

### **GIVING GIFTS-STEWARDSHIP**

We know from the popular Christmas song, that Santa makes a list and he checks it twice. Many of us do the same thing. We make a list of everyone we want to buy gifts for, and we check it twice to make sure no one is left out. We write down the obvious family members and close friends. And then we might think “who else might be giving me a gift that I better have a gift to offer in return?”

Is Christ on your Christmas list? We know we are on His.

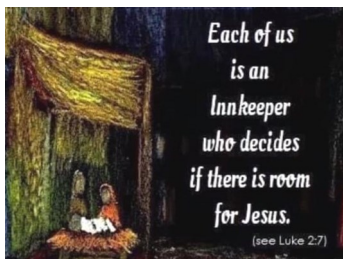
And if He is on the list, what kind of gift will you bring to Him this year?

**December is stewardship month in our parish.** Ideally, we will each make a pledge for next year before the current year ends. There is a practical reason for this. There is a budget for each year to operate our church. A certain amount of money is needed from stewardship to meet our budget. And it would be nice if, before we begin the new year, that we knew how much income we can expect. *So, please send your stewardship form in before the end of the year.*

Some people may ask “why must we fill out a form each year?” And the simple answer is, we don’t want to presume a commitment. This is an annual commitment, which we ask people to make annually.

### **STEWARDSHIP—A WAY OF LIFE**

Stewardship, of course, is about a lot more than financial contribution. **Stewardship is a way of life.** A steward, by definition, is a temporary caretaker. A steward takes care of what has been entrusted to him or her, and a steward knows that whatever he or she may have, is just temporary, because life will eventually come to an end, and many times in life, opportunities will come to an end. I heard a podcast recently about “**the stewardship of your life.**” The speaker said that “**your life consists of whatever you are doing at a given moment.**” So, if I am having a conversation with someone, then my whole life at that moment consists of being a steward to one person, in one conversation. Yes, I’m still a husband, a father, a priest, a homeowner, and so many other roles, but in that given moment, I am a steward to one person. So, in asking myself “**am I a good steward of my life,**” I have to reflect on each conversation, each moment, and ask myself am I a good steward of that moment of my life.



The most important aspect of stewardship actually is our time. Our most valuable commodity is time. There is always the possibility that we can get more money. But there is never a possibility that we can get more time. In choosing how we spend our time, especially in light of giving, we each have to decide how much time we

are going to spend with Jesus. How much time will we spend alone with Him, praying to Him, worshipping Him, listening to Him in Scripture, and being alone in His presence? How much time will we spend serving Him? How much will our life reflect Him? This makes Jesus sound like a demanding God—that we need to pray, worship, listen and serve Him. But this is the wrong perspective. It actually is a privilege and a joy to do these things. Just like it is a privilege and a joy to receive the wisdom that comes from Him, the talents we have received from Him, the very life we have from Him, and so many other blessings. He has given us more than we could ever possibly give back to Him.

The other way we give time to Jesus is how we reflect Him in the time we spend when we are not alone with Him. Likely no one is cursing during their alone time



with God, but how about when we are not spending specific time with Him, like when we are spending time with others? Outside of prayer and worship, does our life reflect a Christian ethos? Will someone be able to identify us as a Christian based on our behavior, or do we behave just like everyone else?

We demonstrate stewardship through how we use the talents and opportunities God has given us. If I have a talent or opportunity and squander it, or don't use it, or use it in an ungodly manner, this is not good stewardship, it does not reflect an appropriate sense of gratitude to the giver.

#### STEWARDSHIP SHOULD BE JOYFUL

We demonstrate Christian stewardship through how we spend our money, especially as it relates to the church. Everyone, whether they have it on paper or not, lives on a budget. We generally know how much money we will bring in. We generally know how much we will spend. Each of us this Christmas will think about how much we will allocate to gifts, to a Christmas tree, etc. Do we put the same thought into how much we will allocate to Christ through the work of the Church? If we have a sense of gratitude and connection with Christ, a natural outflow of that is to bring a gift to the Church so that we can both continue to experience Christ through the Church and so that the Church can share Christ with others. Our stewardship offering should be joyful. St. Paul writes in **2 Corinthians 9:7** *"Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."* And it must be purposeful. Jesus says in **Matthew 6:21**, *"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."* Our hearts will think about important people in our lives as we buy gifts for them this Christmas. Will our hearts also be thinking about Christ as we make our stewardship offering to Him this December?

The decision to pay our taxes is not a prayerful one. It is a legal one. We are assigned an amount we are to pay based on income and deductions and the law tells us that we are to pay it. We do so out of obligation and may even do so begrudgingly. I'm definitely in that category.

The decision to offer stewardship should be done neither out of obligation nor begrudgingly. It should be offered lovingly and prayerfully. **Stewardship is a spiritual decision, not a legal one. Stewardship is not just an offering to the church, but a gift to Christ.** As we make our list of people to get gifts for, we should have Christ first on our list. He should receive the first fruits, not the leftovers, if there are any.

Stewardship is used to meet the expenses of our church—personnel, insurance, ministries, supplies, and charitable contributions, among other things. The more we receive, the more generosity we can offer. The more we receive, the more personnel we can engage, who in turn will bring a richer and more meaningful experience to our faithful. Sadly, in most churches, including ours, we figure out what we have to budget for and charity is whatever is left over. We had been working out way up to 10 percent of our stewardship going to charity, but in order to make ends meet, we've had to reduce it to 5 percent. Hopefully our collective effort will put that number back up where it belongs.

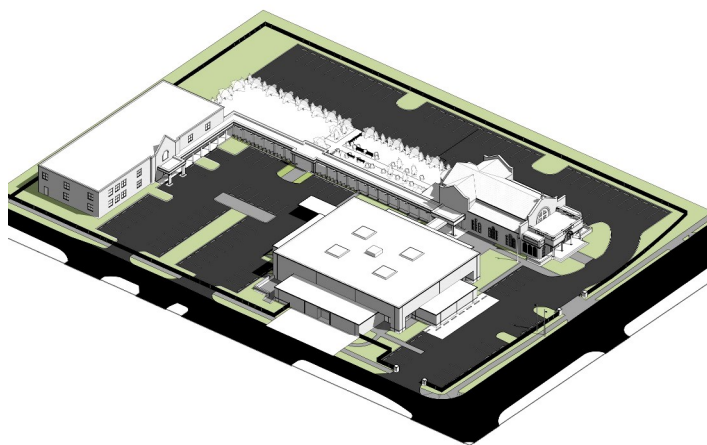
Our Stewardship theme for 2025 will be based on **2 Corinthians 9:11**: *You will be enriched in every way for*

*great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.* Indeed, when we offer a gift to God with a sense of generosity and gratitude, God will enrich us. He won't necessarily do that in a material way—we are not investing to receive a monetary return when we contribute to the mission of the Church. We are enriched spiritually when we give, especially when we do it lovingly, prayerfully and sacrificially. And the spiritual rewards cannot be quantified—grace and mercy in this life, the Kingdom of heaven in the next.

#### A UNIQUE STEWARDSHIP OPPORTUNITY—MINISTRY BUILDING/CHURCH EXPANSION

As we end 2024 and enter into 2025, the church is about to enter a new phase of its history. We are about to embark on a capital campaign to develop our current school building into a ministry center. More ministries will allow more people to learn, which will bring more people who will bring more stewardship and will enable us to offer more charity and service. Most important, a ministry center will allow us to express **"diakonia,"** which is the Greek word for **"ministry."** It will give us a place where there will be learning opportunities for everyone, a place to gather for fellowship, a place to grow in knowledge and in friendship.

At the same time, we need more seats in the church to accommodate all those who wish to worship, a number that has grown significantly in 2024. And finally, we need some updating to our Kourmolis Center (bathrooms, kitchen) and overall to our grounds. We have been talking about this for over a year. Active fundraising is underway. Everyone will receive information on the capital campaign. There are opportunities for gifts large and small. Any gift will be appreciated though. It is not the amount of the gift that will matter, but the spirit with which the gift is given. If you wish to make a gift in the year 2024 in order to make a charitable contribution (many people make additional charitable contributions at the end of the year), please see Fr. Stavros before the end of the year.



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

*Rendering of our campus reflecting ministry building, walkway, pavilion and expanded church.*

## CONCLUSION—LEARNING HOW TO GIVE AND RECEIVE GIFTS

I recently was part of a discussion on how to both give and receive gifts. Most of us can probably learn how to do both of these better. Offering gifts with joy and receiving gifts with gratitude will help not only our interpersonal relationships but also our relationship with the Lord. When we open our gifts on Christmas Day, we will be thankful to those who gave us the gifts and we will express that in the form of hugs, thank you notes, and looking for opportunities to offer gifts in return. When we give gifts, we will do so with a sense of gratitude for our families and friends that we will recognize and think of in our gift offering. It's the same thing with our gifts to God. We receive a gift from God each day—if nothing else, we receive life and breath. And usually, we receive so much more. Just like how we will express gratitude to our families in their gifts, we should express our thanksgiving to God for His gifts—in the form of prayer, obedience, worship and generosity. When we give gifts to God, we should do so with a sense of both joy and gratitude to God for all of His blessings.

As we mark this season of gift-giving, let us not forget **the greatest gift we have ever received—Christ**. Let us make sure that there is room for Him always in the inn of our hearts. And let us offer appropriate gifts as we again journey to the manger.


*On behalf of Presbytera Lisa and Nicholas, I wish you each a Blessed Nativity and a Happy and healthy New Year 2025!*

With love in the Incarnate Lord,  
+Fr. Stavros

9 interesting facts about

# CHRISTMAS

BASILICA.RO



Bethlehem means 'house of bread', a symbol of the Eucharist

The Magi followed the Star for over two years

The mystery of the Nativity was first announced by the angels to a group of shepherds

According to St John Chrysostom, the Star was the Archangel Gabriel

Baby Jesus was born in a cave

The Magi, Caspar, Melchior, Balthazar came from different countries

Two midwives were present, Zelomi and Salome (Virgin Mary's cousin)

Until the fourth century, the Nativity of the Lord was celebrated together with the Epiphany

The Nativity of the Lord is described in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke

## CHARITABLE GIVING AT THE END OF THE YEAR

There are many people who look to give to charity at the end of the year. It might be a company that you work for. It might even be you. Please consider a gift to our Building Fund.

## LEGACY/ESTATE GIVING

One thing that we have not experienced much in our community is legacy or estate giving. Many church communities have stories of people who have passed away and left the church community a sizeable financial gift. In life, we are encouraged to pledge a portion of our yearly income to the church and charitable causes. Ideally this number is ten percent. That's not just ideal, it is the Biblical standard for giving. Ideally, we would do the same thing at the time of our death. We would leave a portion of our estate, whatever remains from us financially, also to the church. Most churches that are thriving have some estate/legacy giving in their history. This is a subject that we haven't emphasized in the past many years and perhaps this is a reason why we have only had a couple of estate gifts. Please consider our parish of St. John in your will as you plan for what will happen with your estate. It is a way to leave a lasting gift and legacy to our church and to our faith, and becomes also a lasting statement of our faith and trust in God, to leave to Him and the Church a portion of what He blessed us with.







Every year on the Sunday of our fall Parish Assembly, I offer my priest report in the church as a sermon I like to call **"The State of our Parish."** The experience of today, Sunday, November 10, in the life of our parish, is actually a microcosm of the state of our community. We have a full church, as we do each Sunday of the year. We don't all

fit in the church and some people are worshipping in the Kourmolis Center. There was a long line for Holy Communion. The choir sang beautifully. There are a lot of young men serving in the altar. Today is also a historical day in the life of our community. There were six Christmations prior to the Divine Liturgy, and there will be two adult Baptisms this afternoon—this is the most number of adults who have ever come into our faith in this parish on a single day. All of them are under age 50, all but one is under the age of 30. There is a renaissance going on in many Orthodox communities, a wave of young people who are either finding Christianity for the first time in the Orthodox church, or who have experienced other Christian denominations and are coming into our church on a pilgrimage to discover the most historically consistent faith in the Christian world. The Orthodoxy 101 class this past January had 35 people and the one we completed in October had 42. We've set a record for Christmations in our parish this year, with 18 so far and maybe a couple more before Christmas. We've also had 5 adult baptisms, so 23 adults have joined our church this year, most of whom had no connection with this parish or the Orthodox Church a year ago. We've had multiple retreats this year—one for Philoptochos, a men's retreat, two young adult retreats, three GOYA lock-ins. Our HOPE/JOY has had multiple retreats, our JOY tweens groups has enjoyed multiple outings, Sunday school has well over 100 students. By the end of the year, we will have celebrated over 100 Divine Liturgies in our parish this year with nearly 200 total services and sacraments. There have been over 80 Bible studies this year, between me and Fr. John. Our monthly young adult discussion has over 30 people each month. GOYA meets at least once a month, our monthly men's group is meeting tonight, and during Lent, we had our annual Lenten dinner series, which was well attended. We still participate in Community Outreach the third Saturday of each month. The calendar is filled month after month with ministries, opportunities to worship, learn, come together as a community and to serve.

This year, we hired a new administrative assistant in March—The monthly Messenger has greatly improved, and there is more efficiency in the office with Elli aboard. Deb has been our bookkeeper for eleven years. And in September, Maria became our full-time ministry coordinator and chanter. Felix has been here for eleven years as our custodian. Tara and Ruth do a great job leading our choir. Fr. John has been assigned as the interim Proistamenos in Sarasota, which will go through at least Pascha of 2025. He is still active in our parish, doing Bible study, confessions, pastoral visits and when he is able, to sub for me, a weekday service or sacrament here and there. While most non-Orthodox parishes of our size have a full-time staff significantly larger than ours, our team is working very hard every day so that we can enjoy not only the

beautiful Sunday Divine Liturgy and all the other things that happen on Sundays, but so that we can enjoy the many things that happen here all throughout the week.

We have many dedicated volunteers, from our Parish Council, to our Philoptochos, Sunday school teachers, choir members, ushers, altar boys and ministry heads. The church is you, the people, the body of Christ, and the church cannot function or spread the Gospel without the work of many people.

The two hurricanes in late September and early October adversely affected many parishioners, as well as our office complex. Through the generosity of many gifts from outside of our parish, we've been able to send some relief to many of those affected. It won't come anywhere near covering the financial cost, but we hope that these gestures are helpful, and that they comfort you in some way, that you know that your church is concerned for you at all times, and specifically in your challenging ones. We have been temporarily displaced from our offices, nursery, Zaharias room, bookstore and meeting rooms. Repairs are ongoing. A large percentage of the materials and labor has been donated, for which we are very grateful. We thank you for your patience as we negotiate this temporary inconvenience. We haven't missed a service, most of our ministries are back as before, and we are making it, with slight alterations to coffee hour and other things.

Our parish is at a crossroad. By definition, arrival at a crossroad is handled in three ways—there is an evaluation of options of which way to go, there is a decision to go, and then there is the actual "go." Two events have happened almost simultaneously. We are coming to the end of the lease of our tenant. And we are exploding population wise as a parish. Our office building, even before the hurricane damage, was on its last legs. We don't have the capacity to have the many ministries we need and that we want to have because the tenant occupies our property five days a week from 6:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m. We can't have icons in our Sunday school classrooms. Greek school is limited to Saturdays. We have no meeting space. The tenant has badly damaged our property and continues to do so on a daily basis. None of this is new news. We've been talking about it for the past several years, especially in the last year as the lease is winding down to its eventual end in June 2025. There are two ways to go—backward or forward. To fulfill our mission and to serve the needs of our parish, we are choosing the option to go forward. The options to expand the church are limited, based on setbacks on the property. We have presented plans to expand the church, remodel the school into a ministry building, update the Kourmolis Center and give a needed facelift to our grounds. A covered walkway between the church and ministry building is part of the plan, so is an outdoor pavilion, added parking and some added green space. Our facilities need better handicap access, the playground needs updating, the parking lot needs a fresh coat of asphalt, and our landscaping could use some work. The remodeled church will have a real narthex, bathrooms, handicap ramps in the front of the church, and two hundred additional seats. The ministry building will have multiple rooms that can be used by our ministries, a small fellowship hall, dedicated classrooms and professional-looking office space.

Our stewardship is such that it practically covers the budget. We do not need a tenant in order to pay our bills. There is the possibility of renting out the building on the back of our property to a professional business for a short term. What a vision if one day this can be a gathering place for our youth, a youth center for the over one hundred children that comprise our community at present. And that we have no tenant at all.

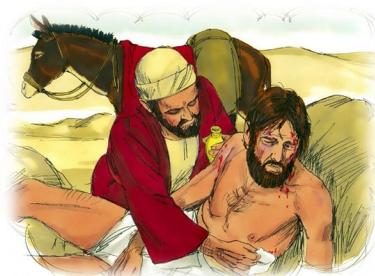
A quiet phase of active fundraising is under way. A vision committee has been meeting for over a year. A full-fledged capital campaign will launch in 2025. These are exciting times in our church. We have the opportunity to make a statement, our generation. We continually remember and honor the sacrifices of our founding families. It is now our time, our turn, to take up the mantle of vision, combined with sacrifice, that they demonstrated for us. It is time for us to make the necessary improvements that will set us on course for the next forty years. We can now move forward, unburdened from the debts of the old day school, unfettered by the restrictions placed on us by the lease we have with our tenant.

The Gospel lesson today is the well-known Parable of the Good Samaritan. We know the story of the man beaten and robbed and left by the side of the road. Who is that man today? He is the person who has been wounded in some way in life—perhaps he is spiritually wounded by shame over sins, or frightened as he gets older and reflects on his mortality; perhaps he has lost his purpose, or is lost in general because he has not yet found the joy of Jesus Christ. Perhaps he is a neighbor who lives in this immediate area, who is neither Greek nor Orthodox, but who can benefit from a ministry of the church. We remember the words of Jesus who told His servants to go to the highways and hedges to compel people to come to His banquet. I was so proud of some of our young people who, on the Sunday after Hurricane Milton, went into the surrounding neighborhoods, not to preach the Gospel or hand out flyers, but to rake leaves and sweep sidewalks. Without knowing it, they actually preached the Gospel, and they lived out the lesson from today—that our neighbor is everyone, and that day, our neighbor hadn't been hurt by robbers, but by a vicious storm. Again, we see people at the side of the road every day, and what do we do with that? Do we pass by on the other side, too distracted or too absorbed with our own things? Or do we pause and say "I could make a difference today for someone."

The Good Samaritan tended to his wounded neighbor in several ways, as best as he was able. In the first instance, he used oil and wine to tend to the man's wounds. He had a skill that he could use. Next, he had a donkey at his disposal and he set the man on his donkey, choosing to walk himself, because he realized he could walk, but the wounded man could not. It didn't matter that it was a Samaritan and that Jews and Samaritans were sworn enemies. If we are all created in the image and likeness of God, it is our own human barriers that cause us to see differences in one another. He offered his valuable time to the man, staying with him at an inn and taking care of him for the rest of the day and into the night. Time is perhaps our most valuable commodity—it is the thing we can't get more of. Many Gospel scholars say that the inn represents the church in this parable. It is the first place we should go when we are wounded. And the oil and wine represent the sacraments of Holy Unction and the

Eucharist, the healing medicine that we find only in the church.

The next day, the Good Samaritan had to continue his journey. Perhaps he had a family to get back to, or a job to do, the parable doesn't tell us. He didn't have any more time though. However, he gave the innkeeper some money and asked that he take care of the man. He could not do any more, but he provided the means for the man to be taken care of. This represents your financial contribution to the church, the inn. You provide the means that keeps the church open, staffed, and functioning, when you make your financial stewardship contribution. You will allow our facilities to expand and serve even better when you contribute to the upcoming capital campaign.



The challenge for our church is that we need a bigger inn, to accommodate more wounded people. And we each stand in the position of the Good Samaritan—what will we do for the wounded people? What about when we are wounded, what kind of respite will we find at the inn? Many of us will jump eagerly at this project. We will step forward and rejoice at this once in a lifetime opportunity to do something special in the life of our parish.

Some of us will step forward, perhaps with some anxiety—I'm sure that the good Samaritan had some anxiety—he approached a sworn enemy to help; he offered two denarii to the innkeeper (that represented two days of work). We don't know how deep his pockets were. But something inside of him said "go, do it, help the man, provide the means to help even your enemy."

Some of you will step forward, slowly, after careful and hopefully prayerful consideration, to join in the mission. Some of us will be distracted, like the priest and the levite, and pass by on the other side. They might have pretended to not hear the message, or think it is not for them, or think someone else will answer the call instead. Some will hear the message and choose not to participate.

And sadly, some I know will oppose, and probably be very vocal about it—they won't understand the Gospel reading, they won't want progress, they won't understand the purpose of the church or the meaning of this parable. Or understand our responsibility as stewards of the Gospel and servants of God to tend to the wounded, to go to the highways and hedges. They will think that their good fortune is theirs, rather than God's blessing on them. And they, like all of us, will have to stand before God and make an explanation for what they did or didn't do.

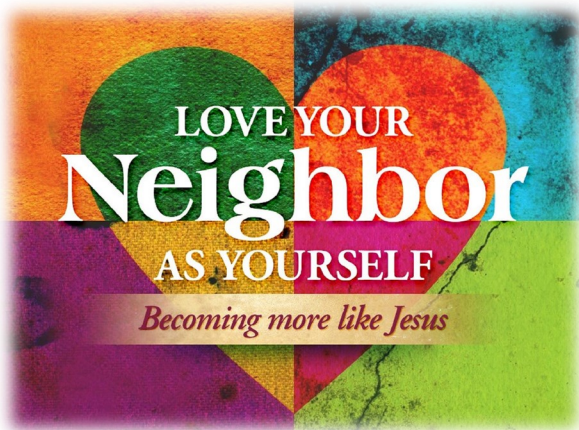
By God's grace, your prayers, your patience and your forgiveness, I have been blessed to serve here now for over twenty years. I hope I will be able to serve for many more. For many years of my life, I feel like I was the priest or Levite in this parable. I saw the man on the side of the road but pretended not to see him, and hoped no one else would notice that I didn't see him.



I was too busy, distracted, self-absorbed, and instead of running to him, I slinked by on the other side. For the past many years of my life, I have tried to be a good Samaritan, and sometimes I have been good and sometimes I have failed. As I get older in my life and in my priesthood, I see the church as the inn, and I identify more with the innkeeper. I eagerly await for the Samaritans to bring in the wounded people. I want to hang a sign on the inn that says "open for all wounded people." However, in the case of our parish, the inn is full, we don't have the proper rooms. We need more rooms at the inn, and eventually we will need more innkeepers. We know that the world is a busy place. Even the best of Samaritans have limited time. So what we really need in order to fulfill this parable, is the denarii to add to the inn, and the denarii to bring in more innkeepers, whether they are priests or lay workers.

The lawyer in the Parable asked Jesus "Who is my neighbor?" And the answer was, "everyone is your neighbor, even your enemy." There is no limit to who our neighbors are. We have four hundred families in our parish at present, and thousands more in our immediate area. If we are really to love our neighbor as ourselves, that means we make our neighbor as much a priority as we make ourselves, we care for his or her wellbeing as we care for our own wellbeing. And as for loving God with all our soul, our heart, our strength and our mind, that means loving God with our time, our talent and our treasure as well. For as Jesus says in **Matthew 6:21**, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." We actually lead with our treasure, and our hearts follow there.

This is where our church is—we have decided to cross the road, knowing there are many wounded people on the other side. We have decided to care for ourselves and for others by creating a ministry building. And we've decided to expand the inn, the church building, so we have more room to take care of one another. What we need now are the eyes of the Good Samaritan—to see the opportunity before us. We need the generosity of the Good Samaritan, to give sacrificially but joyfully to the work of the inn. And what we need most is the courage of the Good Samaritan, to see the enemy not as an obstacle to be feared, but as an opportunity to be embraced.



## LET'S GET ACQUAINTED BY DR. BILL MANIKAS



John Sakkis comes from one of the early Greek families who moved to Tampa in the early 1900s. His grandfather, John Sakkis, was one of the early Greeks who came to the United States in 1896 and settled in New York City. He eventually moved south and settled in Tampa. He married Paniyota Balasis, who was originally from Greece and living in Tampa. In 1918, they were blessed with a son, Nick, Johnny's father.

The senior John Sakkis was one of the founders of the Tampa Lycurgus Chapter of the Order of Ahepa which was organized in 1924. He was also vice-president of the American Hellenic Center, built between 1938-1939. On the Hillsborough River, downtown, The Hellenic Center, was the hub of local Greek life. It not only served as a social center, but it also provided for Greek school, cultural events, charitable events and was home to our church services prior to having a church building. When a building fund was established in 1954 to purchase land and build the church John was one of the biggest contributor.

His son, Nick Sakkis was born in Tampa. He followed his father's footsteps and became the youngest member of the Lycurgus Chapter of the Order of Ahepa. As a member of Ahepa, Nick Sakkis was one of the founders of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church. He served on the parish council for twenty-five years.

He married Helen Milonas from Tarpon Springs. Nick served in WWII and then returned home to work in the restaurant. An entrepreneur like his father, he opened Hillsborough Coffee which was in business until 2005.

Nick and Helen had two children, Johnny (1946) and Patty (1951). John Sakkis senior came to be known as Pop to everyone. In 1954, Pop became a principal fundraiser and contributor to the church building fund. In 1956 Pop, Nick and Helen became founding members of our church. It was then, as a 10-year-old altar boy, that Johnny Sakkis dug the cornerstone.

Johnny attended Plant High School and was a star baseball player. He played baseball on the college level and graduated from Southern Mississippi University with a degree in Business. After graduation he had several odd jobs until his father encouraged him to join him at Hillsborough Coffee, where he spent most of his adult career. The business was always part of the life of our church. They supplied all the coffee and equipment for Sunday coffees and our Greek Festivals from the beginning through 2005. They donated the use of their trucks to transport food during the festival and Johnny made plenty of food runs between the church and convention center downtown. He was known for frying fish for the Palm Sunday luncheon and many times catching it too!

After thirty-five years they sold the coffee business, and John worked for a vitamin discount business for fifteen years before he retired. During that time, he was interested and did some research on alternative medicine.

Johnny married Katherine (Heretz) on September 17, 1983. Originally from upstate New York, she was raised as Ukrainian Orthodox. They met at a TGI Friday's Restaurant in Tampa. She was walking by Johnny's table when he noticed the Orthodox cross she was wearing. This started a conversation between the two and this led to Johnny dating Katherine. In time their relationship grew closer and they got married on September 18, 1946. This year they celebrated their forty-first anniversary. They have one son Nicholas, and he has two daughters, Tasha and Nadia. Together they have five grandchildren.

Family and church were the centers of Johnny's life growing up. An important person in Johnny's life was his grandfather, John. They spent a lot of time together, and for fourteen years they shared a bedroom and so his grandfather had a lot of influence on him. During those years Johnny spoke only Greek until he entered public school. His parents were both extremely involved in the community. His father held positions on the Parish Council for years and his mother was in leadership in both Philoptochos and DOP. Johnny not only served in altar, he was active in GOYA and also became a young AHEPAN. Johnny has done some traveling. He has been to upstate New York, Chicago and Hawaii. Johnny likes to fish and once owned a boat and frequently went fishing.

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR MINISTRY COORDINATOR

## As Good Stewards

### 1 Peter 4:9-11 ESV

<sup>9</sup> Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup> As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, **as good stewards** of God's varied grace: <sup>11</sup> whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

This monthly article will continue to break down these beautiful verses from St. Peter's Epistle one phrase at a time. This month, let's consider another part of verse 10 of St. Peter's writing "...as good stewards..."

What does it mean to be a good steward? A steward is entrusted with something or takes care of something for someone. God has entrusted us with gifts. What we do with them is our stewardship. Choose a verb and see which resonates: cherish, do, care for, treat, value, use, spend, waste, invest.

When we pause to give serious thought to the question of stewardship, can we think of anything we have that has not been truly given to us by God? We humans come with nothing, offer nothing, give nothing, that has not already been given to us by God.

We often boil down stewardship to three things: **time, talent, treasure**. And while it is true that many things can go into one of those three groups, our mindset must shift and consider that EVERYTHING we have is a gift from God – the earth, our health, our freedom, our relationships, our opportunities, our very life. God expects us to make the most of the resources He has generously given. In fact, I like to think He delights in watching exactly how we treat what we have at our disposal when we glorify Him through those things He gave to us. So let's look at our classic three components of being a good steward: time, talent, treasure.

Of these three, it has been argued that the most valuable is time – we quite literally cannot get time back. Once it is gone, it is gone. How we choose to use (insert one of the above verbs if you wish) our time speaks volumes about our priorities. And think about this: never in the history of man have we had more opportunities to squander our time. How often have you picked up your phone to check one thing, and twenty minutes later you have seen recipes, bloopers, outrage at a politician, weather reports, etc. I have to admit this happens to me more than I care to admit. Could there be a more distracted generation?

Last month, we discussed our talents as the gifts God has given us concerning our abilities,

strengths, preferences. Think about what you are good at, what you love doing and these often reveal your gifts and talents. Our SHAPE - that is, our Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, and Experiences - helps to define our purpose in life. God entrusted each of us with these unique abilities. Assess your talents by taking a critical look at what you are good at. Make a list of what you love doing. Ask others. And most of all, experiment with different areas of service and how you can share them with others.

Treasure. Ah, money talk. Nothing makes people more uncomfortable than talking about money in church. We think of it as our own personal business and this may be the case, however, to God, how we treat (insert verb of choice here too) our money is a true test of what we value. In fact, Jesus incorporated money talk into many of His teachings because He knew that money, and the challenges and opportunities it presents, are common to the human experience.

Of these verbs, perhaps "**invest**" is the most helpful to think about in terms of stewardship when it comes to our end of the bargain. An investment is typically intentional, a choice made with careful thought. God entrusts. We invest. Wouldn't it be wise (and an exciting prospect) to invest with the expectation of multiplying what was given to us? Who doesn't enjoy a good return on an investment? We have to think that God certainly does. The parable of the talents in **Matthew 25** clearly shows that God entrusted three stewards with talents, and He was pleased when two of the three stewards doubled what He had given them.

Let us all be thankful to St. Peter for reminding us to be good stewards, and not just with our church lingo, but in every aspect of our life. May we all hear these words when we come face to face with God and give an account of our own stewardship:

*"Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord." (Matthew 25:21)*

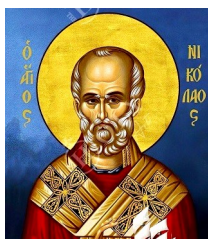
Maria Xenick  
Ministry Coordinator





# LITURGICAL SCHEDULE FOR DECEMBER

Sunday, December 1	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Monday, December 2	<b><u>ST. PORPHYRIOS</u></b> Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Wednesday, December 4	<b><u>ST. BARBARA</u></b> Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Friday, December 6	<b><u>ST. NICHOLAS</u></b> Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Sunday, December 8	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Monday, December 9	<b><u>ST. ANNA</u></b> Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Wednesday, December 11	Paraklesis	6:00p.m.		
Thursday, December 12	<b><u>ST. SPYRIDON</u></b> Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Sunday, December 15	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Monday, December 16	<b><u>CANDLELIGHT LITURGY (EVENING LITURGY)- DANIEL THE PROPHET</u></b> Orthros 5:00p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:00p.m. <i>(A Memorial Service for those who have passed away in 2024 will be held at the end of the Liturgy)</i>			
Wednesday, December 18	<b><u>ST. SEBASTIAN</u></b> Orthros	9:15a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Thursday, December 19	Orthros	9:15a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Friday, December 20	<b><u>ST. IGNATIUS—LITURGY AT SUNRISE</u></b> Orthros	6:15a.m.	Divine Liturgy	7:00a.m.
Saturday, December 21	Orthros	9:15a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Sunday, December 22	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Monday, December 23	Royal Hours of Nativity	9:30a.m.		
Tuesday, December 24	<b><u>NATIVITY OF CHRIST</u></b> Vespers Orthros	9:00a.m. 5:30p.m.	Divine Liturgy Divine Liturgy	9:30a.m. 7:00p.m.
Wednesday, December 25	<b><u>NATIVITY OF CHRIST</u></b> Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Sunday, December 29	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Monday, December 30	<b><u>ST. ANYSIA</u></b> Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Wednesday, January 1	<b><u>ST. BASIL (NEW YEAR'S DAY)</u></b> Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Friday, January 3	Royal Hours of Theophany	9:30a.m.		



St. Nicholas-December 6



St. Anna- December 9



St. Spyridon- December 12



Nativity of Christ-December 25

# LITURGICAL NOTES FOR DECEMBER

## **Monday, December 2 - St. Porphyrios of Kafsokalivia**

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

## **Wednesday, December 4 - St. Barbara and St. John of Damascus**

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

## **Friday, December 6 - St. Nicholas**

We celebrate the feast of St. Nicholas, the patron saint of travelers. He lived in the fourth century. The tradition of Santa Claus is derived from St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, who was giving gifts to those less fortunate.

## **Monday, December 9 - St. Anna**

This feast day commemorates the mother of the Theotokos, and also the conception of the Theotokos, as it falls 9 months before the feast of her Nativity (September 8).

## **Wednesday, December 11 - Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary**

We will continue to offer Paraklesis once a month, so that we can pray for all the members of our community by name, out loud. For December, the Paraklesis will be offered on Wednesday evening, December 11, from 6:00-7:00 p.m.

## **Thursday, December 12 - St. Spyridon**

St. Spyridon was Bishop of Trimythous. Tradition is that each year, the remains of St. Spyridon, also a saint of the fourth century, who was very instrumental in the first Ecumenical Council, are opened to reveal that his shoes have been worn out. They are changed each year. St. Spyridon continues to intercede for the souls of the faithful, wandering over the earth to do so.

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

## **Monday, December 16 – Candlelight Liturgy-Memorial Service**

For the past ten years, we have celebrated an evening service by candlelight in our church, offering a memorial service at the end for those who have passed away during the year. For our service this year, we are going to celebrate the Divine Liturgy by candlelight at 6:00 p.m. (preceded by Orthros at 5:00 p.m.) on Monday, December 16 (Feast of Daniel the Prophet). At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, we will offer a memorial service for those who have passed away from our community in 2024.

**A Christmas "Holy Week"** – We will celebrate the Divine Liturgy each day from December 18-December 25, so we can have additional opportunities to partake of Christ as we prepare for His Nativity. On Wednesday December 18 & Thursday December 19, we will have Orthros at 9:15a.m. and Divine Liturgy at 10:00a.m. On Friday, December 20, Divine Liturgy will be celebrated at 7:00 a.m., preceded by Orthros at 6:15 a.m. We never offer the Divine Liturgy this early in the morning, and it will be a wonderful way to begin the day, to see the sunrise in the church. We will also celebrate Divine Liturgy on Saturday, December 21 at 10:00 a.m., preceded by Orthros at 9:15a.m. We will celebrate Royal Hours of Nativity on Monday December 23 at 9:30a.m. and on Tuesday December 24, we will have Vespers Liturgy at 9:00a.m. and for this day our Orthros will be at 5:30p.m. followed by Divine Liturgy at 7:00p.m. Lastly, on Wednesday December 25, we will celebrate Nativity of our Christ with Orthros at 8:45a.m followed by Divine Liturgy at 10:00a.m.

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

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



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

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

**Services for the Nativity - December 24-25** —On Tuesday, December 24, in the morning, we will celebrate the Great Vespers of Christmas followed by the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. The Vespers of Christmas includes Old Testament Prophecy Readings. It is hoped that those with young children and those who do not drive at night will take advantage of this morning Liturgy, which will be celebrated on December 24 with Vespers at 9:00 a.m. and Divine Liturgy from 9:30-11:00 a.m. *Following the Divine Liturgy, Father Stavros will read a Christmas Story to our children on the solea.*

**On the evening of the 24th**, the church will be open for a time of silent prayer beginning at 5:00 p.m. Orthros will be celebrated at 5:30 p.m., followed by the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom at 7:00 p.m. From 5:00-6:45 p.m., the church will be illumined only by candlelight. The Feast of the Nativity marks the only time in human history that the night became brighter than day with the appearance of the multitude of angels. If you wish, come to church at 5:00 p.m. and you'll be here for sunset, when day becomes night. However, be here at 6:45 p.m., to hear the Doxology, the hymn the angels sang that first Christmas, as night becomes day. Many of you have made a tradition of coming to church for this vigil of prayer and the Orthros and Liturgy and many people who have done so have commented to me how powerful the celebration of Christmas was for them.

**On Wednesday, December 25**, we will celebrate the Orthros (8:45 a.m.) and Divine Liturgy (10:00 a.m.) of the Nativity for those who wish to worship on December 25.

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



### **PARISH REGISTRY**

**Wedding**—Konstantine Louis Pryles and Olivia Madison Marchbanks were married on October 26. Nicholas Pryles was the Koumbaro. **Congratulations!**

**Baptism**—Zayd Myles Goodaker, son of Donald Ryan Goodaker and Nadia Essa Farah, was baptized on October 26. Rawan Farah was the Godparent. **Na Sas Zisi!**

**Baptism**—Daniel William Holland, was baptized on November 10. Markos Mangarides was the sponsor. **Congratulations!**

**Baptism**—Kelly Woodraw Wilson was baptized on November 10. Michael Wenditz was the sponsor. **Congratulations!**

**Baptism**—Nicholas George, son of Peter and Olivia George, was baptized on November 16. Jennifer Siess was the Godparent. **Na sas Zisi!**

**Baptism**—Elaina Rose Preston, daughter of Joshua Preston and Marian Hanhan, was baptized on November 17. Kristina Hanhan was the Godparent. **Na sas Zisi!**

**Chrismation**—Franco Augusto (Ephraim) Di Gennaro Arrojo, was chrismated on November 10. Hernan Roldan was the sponsor. **Congratulations!**

**Chrismation**—Aziela (Mary) Diaz, was chrismated on November 10. Ekaterini Mangarides was the sponsor. **Congratulations!**

**Chrismation**—Samantha (Dymphna) Sky Interval, was chrismated on November 10. Ekaterini Mangarides was the sponsor. **Congratulations!**

**Chrismation**—Kevin (Paisios) Cantero Rodriguez, was chrismated on November 10. Markos Mangarides was the sponsor. **Congratulations!**

**Chrismation**—Jacqueline (Macrina) Guerra, was chrismated on November 10. Ekaterini Mangarides was the sponsor. **Congratulations!**

**Chrismation**—Jose Damian (John) Rivaneira, was chrismated on November 10. Markos Mangarides was the sponsor. **Congratulations!**

**Funeral**—Marina Simites Paras passed away on October 22. Her funeral was held on November 6. **May her memory be eternal!**

# COMMUNITY NEWS

**Women's Bible Study** with Fr. Stavros takes place on most Tuesdays from 10:00-11:30a.m. either in person or zoom. For December, the dates are: Tuesday December 3, Tuesday December 10 & Tuesday December 17. Bible Study will then resume Tuesday, January 14.

**Fr. John's Bible Study** -Will continue to meet in December at **6:30pm** on most Tuesday evenings, discussing Saint Paul's First and Second Letters to Timothy. Check each Sunday Bulletin for the date and time of the studies. These will vary during the month of December.

Join us in person or via zoom for some informative, lively and interactive discussions on how we apply Biblical Principles in our everyday lives.

For December, the dates are: Tuesday December 3, Tuesday December 10 and Tuesday December 17.

**Diving for the Cross at Epiphany-** Attention all young men ages 16-18 (if you will be 16-18 on January 6, 2025)—you are eligible to dive for the cross at the Epiphany celebration in Tarpon Springs. Applications are due on December 10 at 5:00 p.m. No exceptions. There are several requirements that need to be fulfilled in order to participate. If you are interested in diving for the cross, please visit <https://stnicholastarpon.org/diverapp> for more information and to apply.

**GOYA**—The GOYA Meeting for December will be Sunday, December 8 from 5:00-7:30p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

**Men's Group**—Our men's group will meet on Sunday, December 15, 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 December will be "A Bible Study on the Nativity story." Please mark down our dates for men's group for this academic year—Sunday, January 26; Sunday, March 23; and Sunday, May 4.

**Save the Date**—Men's Retreat—Saturday, February 8—Men's Retreat for Orthodox Men of the Tampa Bay Area.

## **Young Adult Dinner/Discussion-Thursday, December 12**

Our young adult group meets once a month for dinner/discussion (and other times for fellowship and service). The meeting for December will be on Thursday, December 12, from 7:00-9:00 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. "We are going to have a "Friendsgiving Celebration" at our meeting, and ask that everyone brings a Lenten dish to share with the group. All young adults, ages 18-40, are invited to participate. We will be having a monthly discussion based on some set topics. The Topic for December is "A Bible Study on the Nativity story". 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.

## **Sunday school Christmas program**

December 15-Following the Divine Liturgy on December 15, our Sunday school children will again present a Christmas program for us.

## **Parish Council Elections**

December 15—Parish Council Elections will be held on Sunday, December 15 following the Divine Liturgy from 12 p.m.– 1 p.m., in the Kourmolis Center.

## **College Student Night**

We will be having our annual College Student Night on Thursday, December 19, beginning at 6:30 p.m. We will have dinner and discussion. All college students are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please RSVP to Fr. Stavros by December 15 if you plan to attend.

**MY WORD 2025** -For the past four years, we've encouraged parishioners to identify one word that will shape their year. With 2025 now a month away, it's time to start thinking of the word that will define you in 2025. Towards the end of December, Father will send out a request for individual words to define you for 2025.

## **St. John needs all hands on deck for Gasparilla on January 25!**

Every year we've opened our parking lot to attendees of the Tampa Bay Gasparilla Festivities. This has been a successful undertaking for years and we are thankful for all who have helped in years past!

To run this event, we are asking for your help once more! We are looking for a new person to chair this event, as our past chairperson is unable to fill that role this year. He is, however, willing to help a new chairperson understand what is involved in this. If you are willing to chair this event, please contact Fr. Stavros. As for everyone else, even a few hours of volunteering is a great help to make this a safe, fun and profitable event. A sign-up genius along with details will be forthcoming through email and the bulletin.





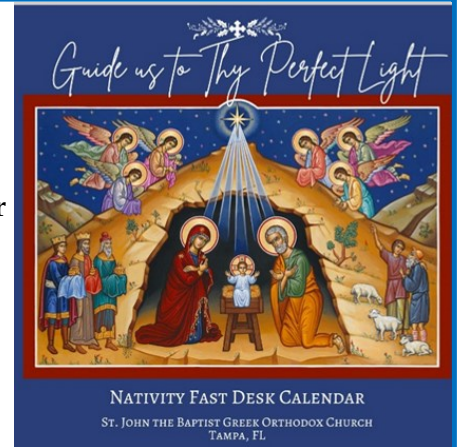
# WELCOME MINISTRY

**WE HOPE YOU ARE ENJOYING YOUR  
GUIDE US TO THY PERFECT LIGHT NATIVITY DESK CALENDAR!**

*The Nativity Fast begins each year on November 15, and this year it fell on a Friday. If you missed the first few weeks, you are not too late to jump in wherever you are in your journey!*

We are so excited to once again utilize our parish wide gift to enhance your family's Nativity Fast and help prepare you for the upcoming celebration of the Birth of Christ! Our carefully created daily desk calendar will help guide your spiritual path during this season with prayers, daily scripture readings, personal reflection points and family action items.

Special thanks to Monastery Icons for allowing us permission to use their beautiful "O Holy Night" Icon of the Nativity.



If you cannot find your calendar or never received one last year, we still have some available. You may pick one up as you leave liturgy or they will also be available in the office during the week.

*During this season of the Nativity Fast, may we grow in Christ's love, both individually and as a community and experience firsthand and seek for someone to  
Guide us to Thy Perfect Light!*

## Christmas Prayer Request

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

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# INSPIRATION

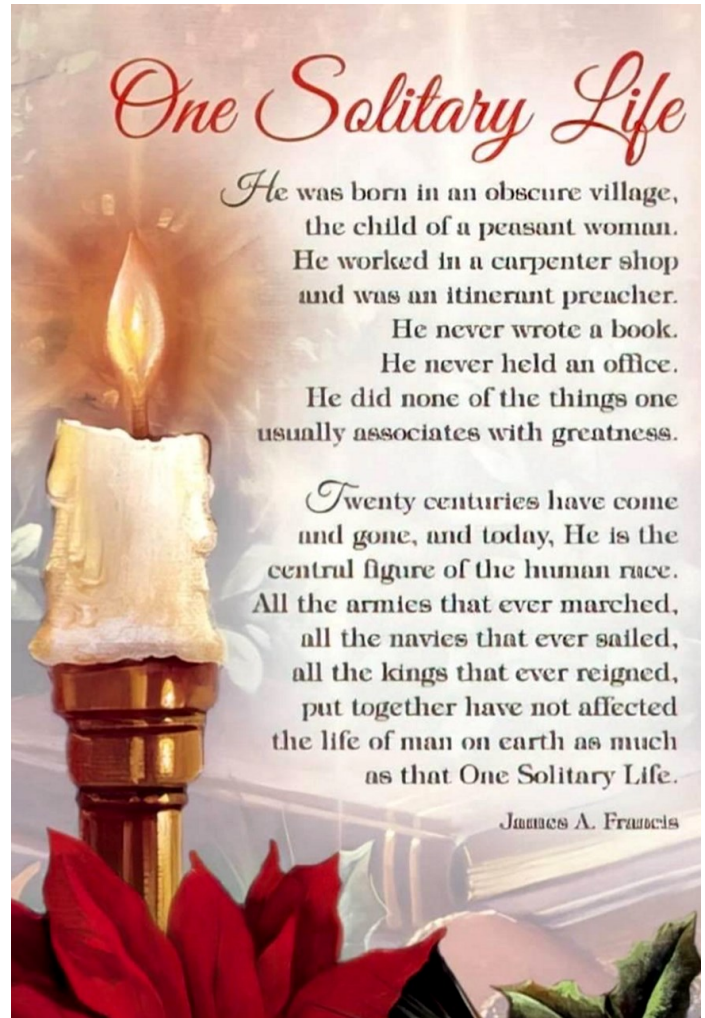
*Always strive to give your spouse the very best of yourself; not what's left over after you have given your best to everyone else. ~Dave Willis*

*Couples who make it aren't the ones who never had a reason to get divorced, they are simply the ones who decided early on that their commitment to each other was always going to be bigger than their differences and flaws. ~Dave Willis*

*Only God can turn a MESS into a MESSAGE,  
A TEST into a TESTIMONY,  
A TRIAL into a TRIUMPH,  
And a VICTIM into a VICTORY.*

## Did you know this?

- \*The partridge in a pear tree is Jesus Christ.
- \*Two turtle doves are the Old and New Testaments.
- \*Three French hens stand for faith, hope, and love.
- \*The four calling birds are the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- \*The five golden rings recalled the Torah or Law, the first five books of the Old Testament.
- \*The six geese a-laying stand for the six days of creation.
- \*Seven swans a-swimming represent the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit--Prophesy, Serving, Teaching, Exhortation, Contribution, Leadership, and Mercy.
- \*The eight maids a-milking are the eight Beatitudes.
- \*Nine ladies dancing are the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit --Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self Control.
- \*The ten lords a-leaping are the Ten Commandments.
- \*The eleven pipers piping stand for the eleven faithful disciples.
- \*The twelve drummers drumming symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel.



## **Thank You, Your Eminence!**

His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta recently announced his retirement from active service as the Metropolitan of Atlanta. His Eminence has served our Metropolis since 1997, first as locum tenens Bishop, then in 1999 as Bishop of Atlanta and since our Metropolis was elevated in 2002, as our Metropolitan. His Eminence was instrumental in establishing the Diakonia Retreat Center in 2004. He visited our parish many times over the years, for our feastday, for anniversaries and special celebrations, during Holy Week, and on many other occasions. We thank His Eminence for his leadership and pray for him to have a peaceful retirement. Eis Polla Eti, Despota.





# HOPE & JOY FALL FOOD DRIVE

**Sun, Nov 3rd- Sun, Dec 15<sup>th</sup>**

**"HOPE starts with a MEAL. HOPE starts with YOU!"**

Metropolitan Ministries helps 50,000+ families in need for Thanksgiving and Christmas and this year they need our help more than ever after hurricanes.

Please join St. John's Hope & Joy children's ministry in providing a meal to families in need through Metropolitan Ministries. Make this your family project and help us put together Boxes of Hope filled with the items needed for a Christmas holiday dinner. There are many ways you can help provide a Box of Hope:

- Shop for any of the items below and bring to church **Sun, Nov 3rd- Sun, Dec 15th.**
- Donate \$25 or more (cash/ check/ gift card) for a Box of Hope-  
**Checks payable to Metropolitan Ministries**

## A BOX OF HOPE contains:

• Gift certificate for a turkey or ham	• 2 cans of black beans
• 1 box of cereal (hot or cold)	• 2 cans of cranberry sauce
• 2 cans of fruit	• 1 bag of dried beans
• 1 jar of peanut butter	• 1 box or bag of rice
• 2 cans of vegetables	• 1 can or packet of gravy
• 2 cans of yams	• 1 box dessert mix
• 1 bag or box of stuffing	• 1 bag cookie mix
• 1 box of potatoes	• 1 family box of Jell-O/Pudding

**BOLD** items are Most Needed Items

Only non-perishable food donations please. Call Zackie Ameres at 813-245-3813 or email at [zackiec@yahoo.com](mailto:zackiec@yahoo.com) with any questions. Thank you!

*"He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will reward him for what he has done." Proverbs 19:17*



## **"VETERANS MAKING A DIFFERENCE"**

Just in time for Veterans Day, the Veterans and First Responders ministry donated 20 navy blue tableclothes to Haleys Cove Nursing Home. This facility is located on the campus of the VA Hospital in Tampa. They have space for 60 residents. The group also donated 3 packages of men's t-shirts, a needed item. Pictured is Speros Georgiou and the Nurse Manager who accepted the donation.








## SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS:


The Sunday School staff prays that you had a wonderful Thanksgiving with your family and friends. We would like to wish you a very Merry Christmas and many blessings for the New Year.

We are very grateful that our Sunday School students will be back in their regular classrooms in December. The only exception is that our Pre-K4 classroom will meet in Rm. 204 for the remainder of our school year. Thank you to all our families for your patience and grace during the many changes we have had to make, due to the flooding of our administration building.

Our topics for November were The Ten Commandments, Communion-Liturgy-Worship, Stewardship, and Charity/Thanksgiving. During our music program our students practiced the Christmas Carols that they will sing in our pageant. Thanks goes to Donna Trakas for leading our music program this year.



Our students are busy memorizing and practicing for our SUNDAY SCHOOL CHRISTMAS PAGEANT which will take place on December 15th. We hope you enjoy this year's Christmas Pageant. We will have the final PAGEANT REHEARSAL for students with speaking parts on Saturday, Dec. 14th at 10:30. **The SUNDAY SCHOOL- HOPE AND JOY Christmas Party will start at 11:15 following the rehearsal.**



## DECEMBER CALENDAR:

**Sunday, December 1st:** NO SUNDAY SCHOOL - THANKSGIVING WEEKEND

**Sunday, December 8th:** Topic: The Nativity

**Saturday, December 14th:** 10:30 Christmas Pageant Rehearsal for students with speaking parts. 11:15 Sunday School Christmas Party

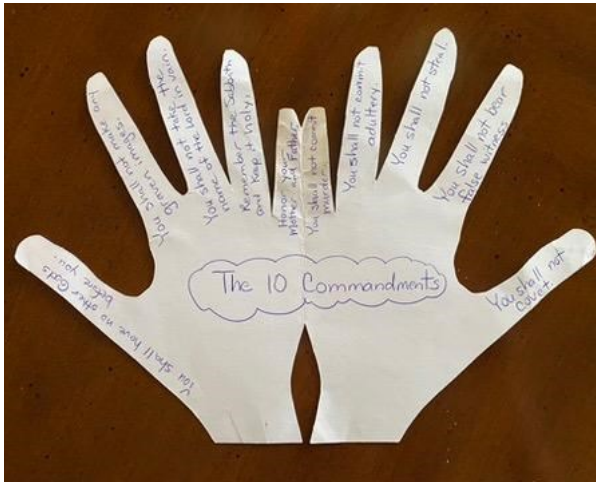
**Sunday, December 15th:** Sunday School Christmas Program

**Sunday, December 22nd and 29th:** No Sunday School Classes

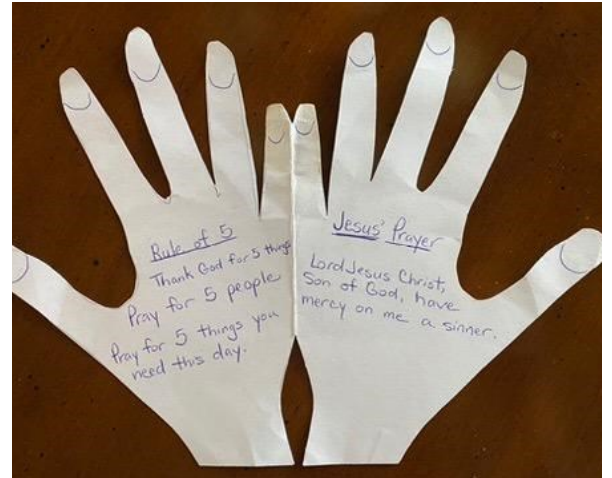




# SUNDAY SCHOOL PHOTOS



**5th Grade  
TEN  
COMMANDMENT  
PROJECT.**  
One side is  
the Ten  
Commandments and the  
other side is  
Jesus'  
Prayer and  
The Pray of  
Five. These  
are praying  
hands.



**The 5th  
Graders  
are proud  
of their  
Chalices.**  
They made  
them 2  
weeks ago  
and will  
make the  
Paten and  
Star  
this  
Sunday.



**"HOPE AND  
JOY FALL  
FESTIVAL  
2024"**





## **JOY TWEENS**

Welcome to the 2024-2025 school year! Our Holy Orthodox Primary Education (HOPE) & Junior Orthodox Youth (JOY) ministries have lots of fun activities planned for this year!

In addition to the HOPE/JOY combined events, we will have meetings and fun activities for our JOY Tweens (4th- 6th grades) at least once per month..

We pray that the JOY Tweens Ministry will give our children, at this pivotal age, an opportunity to develop their faith while also strengthening their bonds with their peers, through age-appropriate activities centered around worship, fellowship, and service. Please mark your calendars and join us. We can't wait to see you!



### **SAVE THE DATE!** **JOY Tweens (Grades 4th - 6th)** **Calendar 2024-2025**



Saturday, December 14	All Youth - Christmas Party
Sunday, January 26 (12:15pm-2:30pm)	JOY Tweens – Parent/Tweens Retreat
Sunday, February 9	HOPE/ JOY – Superbowl of Caring (Donation drive to benefit Children's Home)
Sunday, February 23 (1:00pm)	JOY Tweens - Offsite Activity
Sunday, March 23 (12:15pm)	JOY Tweens - Meeting with Father Stavros
Friday, April 18	HOPE/JOY - Good Friday Retreat
Friday, May 2 (6:00pm)	JOY Tweens – Movie Night
Sunday, May 18	All Youth - End of Year Party

# YOUNG AT HEART

## YOUNG AT HEART NEWS

Our November gathering was a wonderful opportunity to give thanks to God for the gift of friendship and love. Our worship and fellowship brought us together to discuss St. Nektarios of Aegina and his many wonders. **December 7<sup>th</sup>** is the date of our next gathering. A potluck meal, gift exchange, and program are planned. Once again this year, we will participate in the Senior Santa program which provides Christmas gifts to Seniors who will otherwise be left without. Please join us at Young at Heart. We meet each month and are always happy to welcome newcomers.



Join us on Saturday, December 7<sup>th</sup> for the

## YOUNG AT HEART CHRISTMAS GATHERING

*Meet and Greet 11:45 am*

*Potluck Luncheon 12 Noon*

*Followed by Gift Exchange and Christmas Caroling*

*Please bring a wrapped gift with a \$10 value appropriate for either guy or gal.*



*Contact Presvytera Denise no later than Dec 1<sup>st</sup> with the number attending the item you will share for the potluck.*

## COLLEGE STUDENT OUTREACH

Kathy Kaburis is once again leading our college Student Outreach Ministry. We want to connect with our college students who are in school away from home as well as those students who attending college here at one of our local schools in Tampa from other areas around the country who are new to our St. John community.

**TO OUR COLLEGE STUDENTS**—Please join our mailing list to stay connected! Please send your name, current email, mailing address and phone number so you can be placed on our list!  
**TO OUR COLLEGE PARENTS**—Please confirm with your student that we have their contact information!

You can send your information to **Kathy at**  
**kkaburis2000@yahoo.com and or (813)240-6513.**

### College Student Contact Information

Please scan the QR code to go directly to a google form!



# FOOD PANTRY UPDATE



Thank YOU for YOUR ongoing support of the St. John Food Pantry in 2024 ~ This year we helped many families within our own community along with Metropolitan Ministries and Tampa Hope. We prepared 'bags of love' for individuals living at Tampa Hope and will make this a goal in the New Year. Our shelves have remained stocked with your generous donations!

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 of \$20 denominations or less in the church office.

Thank you for your support and thinking of the St. John Food Pantry one item at a time as you shop for your own families. If you have any ideas on how to expand our reach in the new year or know of someone in need, please contact Sandra Pappas at 813-785-3747

## **Requested Food Pantry Items (Please be mindful of expiration dates)-** **Bolded items of greatest need at this time.**

- 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)
- Rice
- Soup – Cans or Ready to Go (just add water)
- Spaghetti Sauce – (no glass)
- **Dry Goods**
- Paper Towels/Toilet Paper

Our **Veterans/1st Responders Ministry** will support the US Marines 'Toys for Tots' Program

again this year!

Donations of unwrapped new toys may be dropped off at the Church Hall in the 'Toys for Tots' containers. The drive will run from **November 10th through**



**December 8th.**



Monetary donations will also be accepted. Checks can be made out to 'St. John's Greek Orthodox Church' - 'Toys for Tots' on the Memo Line.

Please share your love to help make this a special Christmas for kids!



# DAUGHTERS OF PENELOPE

Daughters of Penelope Alcmaeon #167 Tampa

We are wishing you and your family,

Καλά Χριστούγεννα!

Merry Christmas!

Chronia Polla!



The Daughters supported the November activities, are preparing for the Christmas Holidays and planning for the Yiayia's table which supports our Scholarship fund. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November, a joint team with members of the Philoptochos, AHEPA, and the Daughters walked at the Amalie Arena to raise money to **End Alzheimer's**. We are grateful to all that have either donated their time, their money or both to make this event a success. The team exceeded their goal by raising \$2,550.00 and had a wonderful time.



Walk to End Alzheimer's

On November 17, which is designated as **Founders Day**, we prepared and served Koliva and hosted the Coffee hour.

On **December 8, 15 and 22**, will be selling unique, tasteful, affordable handmade items and new items at the **Yiayia's table** in the Kourmolis Hall. All proceeds from this event will support the **Scholarship Fund** for our youth. We are expanding our offerings, and are including vintage, heirloom, and Greek heritage items. All the items are donated, and many items are currently under production including the cute items made from the donated ties. You may support this event by donating handmade, vintage/heirloom or new items and by planning to stop by on Dec 8, 15, and 22 after the Divine Liturgy to explore gift options for family, friends or teachers and décor items for house or office. Samples of some of the items at the YiaYia's table are pictured below:



Sample offerings made with seashells



Framed 1873 Greek coins and sample of gift bags



Sample of vintage jewelry

To support the planned activities or to join the Daughters please contact Maria Zabetakis, Vice President and Membership Chair at [maria1106@live.com](mailto:maria1106@live.com) or Ourania Stephanides, President at [stephanides.ourania@gmail.com](mailto:stephanides.ourania@gmail.com). Please visit the national site for information regarding the Daughters of Penelope organization [www.DaughtersofPenelope.org](http://www.DaughtersofPenelope.org).





American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association  
(AHEPA) and Daughters of Penelope

PRESENT

# "Birth of Jesus Christ"

## Scholarship Fundraiser

### DECEMBER 21, 2024

Orthos 9:00 AM | Liturgy 10:00 AM

Please attend this moving liturgy, followed by this very special fundraiser event featuring two wonderful speakers:

**Rev. Father Panayiotis Papageorgiou, Ph.D.**  
"Does God Exist? How Do We Know?"

**Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis**  
"Which Person In The Story Are You?"  
(see more about them on reverse side)

AND

**"HUMAN TRANSFORMATION THROUGH REPENTANCE: ST. MARY OF EGYPT"**  
a very moving film from Trisigion Productions, will be shown in the Kourmolis Hall

**AHEPA HAS GIVEN 55 SCHOLARSHIPS IN THE LAST 14 YEARS**

**Light Snacks will be provided in the Kourmolis Center**

**ADMISSION IS FREE • DONATIONS ONLY**  
This is a Tampa AHEPA Family Fundraising Event

A large attendance is expected so please reserve your space early:  
**CALL 727.210.2699 or EMAIL [ahepa.tampa.12@gmail.com](mailto:ahepa.tampa.12@gmail.com)**

**St. John The Baptist Greek Orthodox Church**  
**2418 W. Swann Avenue • Tampa, FL 33609**



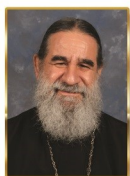
### Our Guest Speakers



#### **About Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis**

- Born in Whittier, California
- Graduated from Whittier College with a degree in history
- Graduated from Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary in 1998 with a Masters of Divinity
- Married to Lisa Akrotirianakis since July 1995
- Ordained a deacon in 1997, and a priest in 1998
- Served as Deacon to Metropolitan Methodios of Boston (1997-1998)
- Have served parishes in Enfield, CT (1998-2000); Asheville, NC (2000-2004) and has served St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Tampa, FL since September 2004
- Has a 17-year-old son named Nicholas
- Has co-directed St. Stephen's Summer Camp for the Metropolis of Atlanta since 2001--this is a summer camp for Orthodox teens
- Has more than doubled the size of our parish in 18 years, from 220 families to 450 at present

- When not working or writing, enjoys spending time with family, traveling (has been to 47 of the 50 states), working in the yard and watching sports.
- Have written a daily reflection called "The Prayer Team" since February 2015-- this gets emailed to over 4,600 people each day and also is available on several platforms.
- The Prayer Team reflections have resulted in the publication of 9 books, with one more waiting for publication. The books are:
  - *Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections on Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany*
  - *The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection*
  - *Blessed is the Kingdom: Reflections on the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*
  - *Let Us Be Attentive: Reflections on the Sunday and Feastday Scripture Readings of the Orthodox Church*
  - *Engaged: Called 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*
  - *Unto the Healing of Soul and Body: Encouragement for Restoration and Reconciliation in a Broken World*



#### **About Rev. Father Panayiotis Papageorgiou, Ph.D.**

Fr. Panayiotis was born on the island of Cyprus. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Chemical Engineering from City College in New York, a Master of Science in Chemical Engineering from the University of Notre Dame, a Master of Divinity from Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Brookline, MA, and a Ph.D. in Early Christian Studies from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

He has served as a priest in the U.S. and Cyprus over the last 36 years and has taught Orthodox Theology and Spirituality in Cyprus, at the Swedish Theological Institute of Jerusalem, Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem, Nazarene University, Calgary, Canada, The Holy Spirit College in Atlanta, Emory University in Atlanta and various other places in the U.S.

He has been the Presiding Priest of Holy Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church in Marietta, Georgia since 2006 and serves on several committees of the Metropolis of Atlanta and currently on the Archdiocesan Council in 2018, working with his son Erstratos, they established the Online Ministry "Trisagion Films, Inc." which he continues to lead until today.

Fr. Panayiotis continues to pursue research in Late Antique Roman History and Theology and is the author of many articles published in American and International Journals. He has also published the book: *Homilies on Romans by St. John Chrysostom, Volume 1*, (a modern English translation) Holy Cross Press, 2013 (Second Edition is due in the near future) and is also working on the second volume of the *Homilies*. Ph.D. Dissertation: "A Theological Analysis of Selected Themes in the Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans." Ph.D. dissertation, The Catholic University of America, Washington D.C., 1995. One of his most read research papers is "Chrysostom and Augustine on the Sin of Adam and its Consequences," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 4 (1995): 361-379.

Fr. Panayiotis is married to Presvytera Catherine. They have two adult children, a son Erstratos and a daughter Olympia. He and Presvytera Catherine have recently become pappou and yiaia (grandparents) of a boy (Panayiotis) from Erstratos and his wife Marina who live in Ayia Napa, Cyprus since 2021.

Recently, our AHEPA Chapter 12 from St.

John the Baptist Church, donated a new Defibrillator to our Church. It is located in the Narthex, next to the candle stand. While we currently have one in the Kourmolis Center, the need to have one in the church in case of a cardiac emergency was deemed a necessity. While we hope that we never have to use it, we thank our AHEPA Chapter for their generosity.



Donated By  
Ahepa Lycurgus  
Chapter 12  
Tampa FL

# 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, 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 its 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.~*

## 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 is : 12/21.**

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

**To Volunteer:** [Click Here](#), (link 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***



# NURSING MINISTRY

## What is holiday depression?

The holiday season for most people is a fun time of the year filled with parties, celebrations, and social gatherings with family and friends. For many people, it is a time filled with sadness, self-reflection, loneliness, and anxiety. The holidays, like many other events, can impact people in a lot of different ways. Depending on what's going on in your life right now, and in the world around you. Holiday depression can cause disruption to your relationships, your mental health and your ability to manage everything that comes along with the holiday season. But what causes it, exactly?

Holiday depression is triggered by the onset of holidays, holiday get-togethers, large family gatherings, and attending or hosting social events. Holiday depression is like "winter blues," but it may come and go in quick bursts as one event ends and another begins, or it can linger for the days or weeks leading up to and beyond the holiday season. Holiday depression can strike anyone at any time and sometimes, even when least expected.

"With holiday depression, there's a sense of being on the outside looking in, and that idea that everybody else is having a great time when you're not or don't feel like you can. Causes of holiday depression

## Holiday depression can be triggered by any of the following:

**Stressful schedules.** Burnout can really inhibit how you're feeling about yourself and others you care about. And when you're overwhelmed with stress, it can lead to depression.

**Putting pressure on yourself.** If you're the person organizing or hosting a holiday gathering, you're probably putting a lot of pressure on yourself to live up to very high expectations you set for yourself.

**Separation from loved ones.** If a family has experienced loss or are separated from a loved one, that can make the holidays a sad time.

**Loneliness.** Whether it's the loss of a loved one or if you don't have a family to celebrate the holidays with, isolation can lead to loneliness, grief and depression at a time of year when so much emphasis is put on celebrating. The holidays can sometimes shine a spotlight on what you feel you're lacking in life.

**Family dynamics.** Many people find the holidays stressful because of conflicts and family feuds.

**Seasonal depression.** The holidays coincide with the onset of winter, when it gets dark earlier and temperatures plunge. As a result, seasonal depression (seasonal affective disorder) rises at the same time, sometimes impacting the holiday experience.

**Social anxiety.** If you're routinely distressed when entering social gatherings and participating in events, connecting with others over the holiday can feel excruciating and trigger lots of emotions.

## Some ways to avoid holiday stress and depression

- Make realistic expectations for the holiday season.
- Don't set yourself up for disappointment and sadness by comparing today with the good old days of the past.
- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Pace yourself. Do not take on more responsibilities than you can handle.
- Make a list and prioritize the important activities. This can help make holiday tasks more manageable.
- Be realistic about what you can and cannot do.
- Do not put all your energy into just one day (i.e., Thanksgiving Day, New Year's Eve)
- Live and enjoy the present.
- Look to the future with optimism.
- If you are lonely, try volunteering to help others.
- Limit your drinking
- Try something new. Celebrate the holidays in a new way.
- Spend time with supportive and caring people.
- Reach out and make new friends.
- Make time for yourself!

# BOOKSTORE

## ST. JOHN'S BOOKSTORE CHRISTMAS SHOP

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



*Have a Joyous Nativity and a New Year filled with God's richest blessings!  
Presvytera Denise, Elaina, and Diane – Your Bookstore Staff*

# PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS!

## December Calendar!



**12/1 - Christine Scourtes 100th Birthday Party**—after divine liturgy—Open to the entire community. Please come and celebrate. Lunch buffet and birthday cake. Sponsored by Philoptochos and the Parish Council. We will be accepting donations to Lighthouse for the blind, that will be given in Christine's name.



**12/8 & 12/15 — Christmas Bake Sale**—after divine liturgy—spanakopita, tiropita, vasilopita as well as baklava & kourambiethes, will be available for sale Dec 8 and 15th.



First come, first serve.

**Christmas Meals for Needy** — We are partnering with the Sunday School and Joy/Hope to provide Christmas meals to the needy. In particular, Philoptochos is collecting \$15.00 gift cards for turkey. If you want to donate gift cards please give them to Katherine Sakkis. If you would rather donate money, see Katherine or Tina Andre and we will purchase the gift cards for you.



# STEWARDSHIP



*"You are the LIGHT of the world" Matthew 5:1*



## **Thank You for your Gifts of Stewardship**

*We wish you a Blessed Nativity Fast and Joyous Christmas Season!*

*Our Stewardship continues to grow thanks to you. Currently 273 Individuals/Families have returned a Stewardship Pledge Form with another 77 that have contributed without a form. That's 350 total who have answered the call to give back in support of our beloved church, resulting in \$574,224 given so far.*

*We appreciate the gifts of our loyal parishioners and wish to acknowledge everyone. Please let us hear from you today if you haven't submitted your pledge form. If you have been attending St. John's for a while and love what you see, hear and experience, please join our parish. If you have talents that would benefit our church ministries, we would be honored for you to join us. Like I have often heard Father Stavros say, "it's time to be All In".*

*It is always best to include a Stewardship Pledge 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 a moment to reflect on what you and your families can offer in **Time, Talent, and Treasure**. All of us contributing together, to the best of our ability, will provide the means necessary to keep our parish community strong! Please feel free to contact The Stewardship Committee at 813-748-1220 if you have any questions or comments to share. We return all voice messages or texts, promise.*

*\* Indicates receipt of a Stewardship Check without a completed pledge form. Our office will be happy to forward a pledge package, and the form can also be completed on-line. Keep in mind pledges in writing help us adequately plan financially for our church and bring voting privileges, which are critical to support the mission of our church.*

*It is our hope that EVERYONE on our mailing list provides gifts of stewardship OR becomes a Friend of St. John.*

Abramis, John G (Nicky M.), Mr. & Mrs.

Afloarei, Michael (Mariana), Mr. & Mrs.

Akrotirianakis, Stavros (Presbyteria Lisa), Rev. Fr.

\*Alikakos, Maria, Ms.

Alithinos, Ekaterini, Mrs.

\*Alnaser, AJ-Peter, Mr.

Alsina, Angel (Lisa), Dr. & Mrs.

Ambrozy, Philip, Mr.

Andre, Gregory (Haritini Tina), Mr. & Mrs.

Angelos, Charles (Maria), M/M

\*Anghelescu, Mihnea (Damian Gabriela), Mr. & Mrs.

Apockotos, James (Maria), Mr. & Mrs.

Apostoleres, Nicholas S. (Rosalie C.), Mr. & Mrs.

Apostolos, George T. (Cheryl), Dr. & Mrs.

Armstrong, Jim (Myra), Mr. & Mrs.

Assimiadis, Paul, Mr.

Austin, Kyle (Hali Drizis), Mr. & Mrs.

Bach, Chris, Mr.

Bakirdgi, Joan, Mrs.

Balasis, Maria, Ms.

Balasis, Suzy, Mrs.

\*Barron, Christian, Mr.

Beach, Kevin (Borgeas, Heidi, Ms.), Dr.

Bedan, Matt (Christi), Mr. & Mrs.

\*Bilthouse, Kevin (Carena), Mr. & Mrs.

Blackburn, Robert T. (Kathryn), Mr. & Dr.

Blankenbaker, James (Michelle), Mr. & Mrs.

Bondi, Katerina Rena, Ms.

Bogas, Constantine (Angela), Mr. & Mrs.

Bouzinakis, Andrew (Kathryn), Mr. & Mrs.

Bradshaw, Harold (Pelagia), Mr. & Mrs.

\*Brewer, Christopher (Jaime), Mr.

\*Calamunci, Alex (Sarah), Mr. & Mrs.

Callahan, Clark (Paloma), Mr. & Mrs.

Capitano, Frank (Christina), Mr. & Mrs.

Carter, John (Genie), Dr. & Mrs.

\*Catsikopoulos Evanovich, Lauren (Catsikopoulos, John, Mr.), Dr.

Cauthorn, Ken (Helen), Mr. & Mrs.

Chagaris, George (Kalliope), Mr. & Mrs.

Chakonas, Ethel Athena, Mrs.

Charalabakis, Terry G., Mr.

Cherpelis, Basil (Alyssa), Dr. & Dr.

Chiakulas, Gregory, Mr.

Choundas, Marina (Thatcher, Greg, Mr.), Ms.

Choundas, Peter (Adis), Mr. & Mrs.

Christodoulou, Maryann, Mrs.

Christopher, Louis (Penny), Mr. & Mrs.

\*Cifelli, Paul, Mr.

Ciotti, John (Melanie), Dr. & Mrs.

Colado, David (Alexandria), Mr. & Mrs.

Comminos, William (Margaret), Mr. & Mrs.

Costas, Antonia, Ms.

\*Costello, Patricia, Ms.

Costianes, Kathleen, Ms.

\*Cotterman, Sandra, Ms.

\*Crassas, Alkis (Aime), Mr. & Mrs.

Cucuz, Victor (Cynthia), Mr. & Mrs.



Cyhan,Dawn,Ms.	*Grapsas,Constantine(Irene),Mr. & Mrs.
Dalaklis,Joanne,Ms.	Gregory,Daniel(Alicia),Mr. & Mrs.
De Armas,Jose,Mr.	*Guarino,Paul(Harriet),Mr. & Mrs.
De Maio,Alexandra,Ms.	Hakim,Fady(Guirguis,Mary,Mrs.),Mr.
Delashaw,Alex(Kim),Mrs.	Halikoytakis,Alex,Mr.
*Demas,Anna K.,Ms.	Halikoytakis,Michael(Edith),Mr. & Mrs.
Demas,John,Mr.	Halkias,Chris,Mr.
Demos,Maria,Ms.	Halkias,George(Elaine),Mr. & Mrs.
Despenas,Preston(Christina),Mr. & Mrs.	Hambos,George,Mr.,Jr.
DeYoung,John(Jenna),Mr. & Mrs.	Hambos,George(Donna),Mr. & Mrs.
Diamantakes,Georgia,Ms.	Hanhan,Amin(Gloria),Mr. & Mrs.
Dimas,Gregory(Patsavos,Evelyn,Ms.),Dr.	Hanhan,Usama(Lina),Dr. & Mrs.
*Dimitrijevič,Stephen(Alina),Mr. & Mrs.	Hartsfield-Molina,Christie,Dr.
Doxas,Joan,Ms.	Hartung,Mark(JoAnn),Mr. & Mrs.
Dyer,Joe(Mina),Mr. & Mrs.	Heilman,Anthony(Theresa),Mr. & Mrs.
Dzhagriev,Aleksandr,Mr.	Henderson,Kenny(Nickollet),Mr. & Mrs.
Edquid,Marc(Maraquet),Mr. & Mrs.	Higdon,Skip,Mrs.
Eggleston,Catherine,Mrs.	Hoff,Eleni,Mrs.
*Ekonomou,Anthony(Diana C.),Mr. & Mrs.	Holland,Laura(Daniel),Mrs. & Mr.
Estelle,Patricia,Ms.	*Horack,Rena,Ms.
Evdemon,Stanley(Mary Ellen),Mr. & Mrs.	Horton,Maria,Mrs.
Fallieras,George,Dr.	Hughes,Georgia,Ms.
Fallieras,Lauren,Ms.	*Hughes,Madisyn,Ms.
Fallieras,Nicholas(Susan),Dr. & Mrs.	Iraklianos,Mike,Mr.
Fellios,George(Zeina),Mr. & Mrs.	Jacobsen,Paul,Mr.
Ferekides,Christos(Debbie),Dr. & Mrs.	James,Arthur M(Abby),Mr. & Mrs.
Findlay,Karina(Andrew),Dr.	*Jennewein,Robert(Georgia),Mr. & Mrs.
Forde,Dwight(Ewana),Mr. & Mrs.	*Jewtushenko,Raissa,Ms.
*Fotopoulos,Anthony(Carole),Mr. & Mrs.	Johnson,Aphroditi,Mrs.
*Frantsvog,Eric(Maria),Mr. & Mrs.	Johnston,Angela,Ms.
Frazier,Chris,Ms.	Kaburis,Kathy,Mrs.
*Frey,Carlos(Sorolis-Frey,Sophia,Ms.),Mr.	Kafantaris,Michael(Amy),Mr. & Mrs.
Galin,Mary,Ms.	Kallenekos,Constantine,Mr.
Garcia,Rick(Stamie),Mr. & Mrs.	*Kantaras,Dean(Areti),Mr. & Mrs.
Gavalas,Debbie(Ritchie,Robert,Mr.),Mrs.	Kapetan,Martha,Ms.
Gemmellaro,Giovanni(Jennifer Alastanos),Mr. & Mrs.	Kaplanis,Michael,Mr.
Genever,Robert(Stacy),Mr. & Mrs.	Kastis,Constantino(Gianoula),Mr. & Mrs.
Georgas,Thomas(Janet),Mr. & Mrs.	Kastrenakes,Michael(Maria),Mr. & Mrs.
*George,Michael(Peggy),Mr. & Mrs.	*Katsadourous,Konstantin(Katherine),Mr. & Mrs.
George,Peter(Olivia),Mr. & Mrs.	*Katsamakis,Perry(Betty Katherine),Mr. & Mrs.
*Georgiou,Anastasios(Hoff,Cynthia),Mr.,II	*Katzaras,George(Angelina),Mr. & Mrs.
Georgiou,Aristos(Joanna),Mr. & Mrs.	Katzaras,Nicholas,Mr.
Georgiou,Speros(Eleanor),Mr. & Mrs.	Katzaras,Nick(Helen),Mr. & Mrs.
Gerecke,Ed(Terri),Mr. & Mrs.	Katzaras,Stefan(Kara),Mr. & Mrs.
Gialamas,John(Lisa),Mr. & Mrs.	Kavouklis,Chris(Debbie),Mr. & Mrs.
Giallourakis,Michael(Arty),Mr. & Mrs.	*Kavouklis,Maggie,Ms.
Gorter,Maria,Ms.	Kazanis,Deno(Barbara),Dr. & Dr.
Graham,Troy,Mr.	Kehagias,Elizabeth(Papadimitriou,Nikolaos,Mr.),Mrs.
Grammaticas,Bill,Mr.	Ketchum,Elena(Para,Gus,Mr.),Mrs.

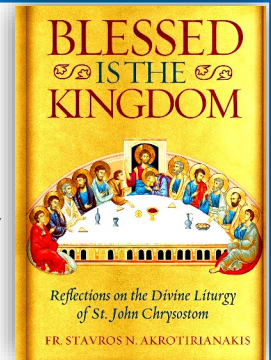
*Kickish,Robert(Rosalia),Dr. & Mrs.	*McAdams,Maria
Kirill,Khomenko(Bezzub,Yana,Ms.),Mr.	*McMillan,Andrew,Mr.
*Kladakis,Manuel(Cynthia),Mr. & Mrs.	Mellen,Eric(Artemis),Mr. & Mrs.
Kladis,George(Charlene),Mr. & Mrs.	Mellon,Andria,Ms.
Klawinski,Ryan (Tataris,Maria,Ms.),Mr.	Melton,Greg(Victoria),Mr. & Mrs.
*Klimis,Manuel(Jenny),Mr. & Mrs.	*Menendez,Noah(Sara),Mr. & Mrs.
Koklanaris,Dena,Ms.	*Miaoulis,Maria N.,Ms.
Konstas,Demetrios(Mary Ann),Dr. & Mrs.	Milonas-Brock,Stacie,Mrs.
*Korakis,Alexandros(Louise),Mr. & Mrs.	Milonas,Alyssa,Ms.
Koudouna,Anthony,Mr.	Milonas,Taso(Thay),Mr. & Mrs.
Koudouna,Dora,Ms.	Mitseas,Dean,Mr.
Kouimanis,Nicholas(Sonja),Mr. & Mrs.	Mitseas,George(Catherine),Mr. & Mrs.
*Koumoutsos,Angela,Ms.	*Moran,Andrew(Stefanie),Mr. & Mrs.
Koumoutsos,Sofia,Ms.	Morgan,Theodora,Ms.
Koutroumanis,Dean(Maria),Mr. & Mrs.	Moshos,Doukissa,Ms.
Krinos,Dimitri(Melissa),Mr. & Mrs.	Mueller,Jeffery(Melinda),Mr. & Mrs.
*Krinos,John(Sue),Mr. & Mrs.	Murnaghan,Peter(Christina),Mr. & Mrs.
*Kwasny,Foti(Fatin),Mr. & Mrs.	Myer,Magdalini,Mrs.
Kyaw,Poe,Ms.	Nassar MacLean,Hend(MacLean,Erik,Mr.),Mrs.
*Kyrus,Chris(Katherine),Dr. & Dr.	Nassar,Alicia(Katherine),Dr. & Mrs.
L'Hommedieu,Tim(Tia),Mr. & Mrs.	Naum,Dean(Sandra),Mr. & Mrs.
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Ladas,Suzanna,Ms.	Nenos,Vasilios,Mr.
*Lakic,Mile(Melanie),Mr. & Mrs.	Niatsikas,Kiriakos(Stefanou,Amalia,Dr.),Mr.
*Laliotis,Panagiota,Mrs.	Nicklow,Tom(Demetra),Mr. & Mrs.
*Laliotis,Stavros(Adriana),Mr. & Mrs.	Nicolaou,Christos(Dee),Mr. & Mrs.
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Lenardos,Peter,Mr.	*Oster Whaley,Susan,Mrs.
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Leontsinis,Nicole,Ms.	Palios,George(Julie),Mr. & Mrs.
*Letobarone,Domenic(Melanie),Dr. & Dr.	*Palios,Michael(Bessie),Mr. & Mrs.
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*Love,Mason,Mr	Panagopoulos,George,Mr.
Lubonja,Raimonda(Kostaq),Mr. & Mrs.	Panos,Euripides(Denise),Mr. & Mrs.
Lucas,Gordon(Evanne),Mr. & Mrs.	*Panson,George(Sherry),Mr. & Mrs.
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Machado,Adrian(Maria),Mr. & Mrs.	Papadakis,Alec(Lauren),Mr. & Mrs.
Magos,Tony(Mary), Mr. & Mrs.	Papadopoulos,Kyriakos(Melkumova,Lucy,Mrs.),Mr.
Malacos,John G.(Lucy A.),Mr. & Mrs.	Papaeconomou,Lambros(Deborah),Mr. & Mrs.
Malatin,Michael(Gabrielle),Mr. & Mrs.	Papakosta,Peter(Vasiliki),Mr. & Mrs.
Maltezos,Chris,Mr.	Pappas,Paul(Georgia),Mr. & Mrs.
Maltezos,Lisa,Ms.	Paras,Marianne,Mrs.
Mangarides,Markos (Petranelis,Ekaterini,Mrs.),Mr.	Passavanti,Robert(Debbra),Mr. & Mrs.
Manikas,William(Nancy),Dr. & Mrs.	Payne,Suzanne,Mrs.
Mantzanas,Chris(Nicole),Mr. & Mrs.	Peckham,Richard(Victoria),Mr. & Mrs.
Mason,Rex Garrison(Maria Nicole),Mr. & Mrs.	Perdicas,Ernest(Nancy),Mr. & Mrs.
Matassini,Nicholas G.(Christina),Mr. & Mrs.	Peregoy-Milonas,Deanna,Mrs.



*Perich,Tanya,Ms.	Stanovich,Samuel(Carmia),Mr. & Mrs.
Peters,Alexandra,Ms.	Stavropoulos,Jane,Ms.
*Petropoulos,Terryl(Konstantinos),Dr. & Mr.	Steele,Elliott(Dianne),Mr. & Mrs.
*Pierroutsakos,Alex(Valerie),Mr. & Mrs.	Stefero,Elaina,Ms.
Pileggi,Suzanne,Ms.	Stefero,John(Presbyteria Denise),Rev. Father
Plakas,Theodore(Kyriakoula),Mr. & Mrs.	Stephanides,Marios(Ourania),Dr. & Mrs.
Preston,Joshua(Marian Hanhan),Mr. & Mrs.	Stitt,William(Deborah),Mr. & Mrs.
Price,Bradley(Gerri),Mr. & Mrs.	Stratigakos,Helen(Sleet,Daniel,Judge),Ms.
Prodromitis,Amzi(Zinser,Zachary,Mr.),Ms.	Stratigakos,Louis(Georgia),Mr. & Mrs.
Prodromitis,Themie(Harvie,Douglas,Mr.),Ms.	*Tedrick,Matthew(Ellen),Mr. & Mrs.
Pyszkowski,Joshua(Andrea),Mr. & Mrs.	Theophanous,Peter,Mr.
Radulescu,Alexandru(Alma),Mr. & Mrs.	Thomas,Larry(Tina),Dr. & Mrs.
Raptis / Stavropoulos,Lisa,Ms.	*Thompson,Wesley(Melissa),Mr. & Mrs.
*Rivadeneira,Jose(Jackie),Mr. & Mrs.	Tisdale,Greg,Mr.
*Roby,Joshua(Lisa Elaine),Mr. & Mrs.	Tohovitis,John(Athanasopoulos, Sarah,Ms.),Mr.
Rogers,Aris,Mr.,II	Touliatos,Markissa,Ms.
Rogers,Aris,Mr.,Sr.	Trakas,Andrew(Adrienne),Mr. & Mrs.
Rose,Maryann,Ms.	Trakas,Peter(Donna),Mr. & Mrs.
Rose,Steven(Lelekis,Alexis,Mrs.),Mr.	Triantafilou,Marcelle,Ms.
*Roussos,Nicholas,Mr.	*Trimis,Michael(Diane),Mr. & Mrs.
Roy,Perry(Alysa),Mr. & Mrs.	Tsatalis,Andrea,Dr.
Sakaris,James(Lorraine),Mr. & Mrs.	Tsetsekas,Steve(Deanna),Mr. & Mrs.
*Sakaris,Thomas(Barbara),Mr. & Mrs.	Tsibris,John,Dr.
Sakkis,John(Katherine),Mr. & Mrs.	Tzatzimakis,Paul,Mr.
*Samarkos,Gracie,Ms.	Valaes,Demetrios(Lynn A.),Mr. & Mrs.
*Samuel,Calvin(Vivian),Mr. & Mrs.	Verras,Spiro(Roman),Mr.
Sandborn,Marilyn(Steve),Mr. & Mrs.	*Voisey,Richard(Katherin),Mr. & Mrs.
Sarantos,Pete(Ann),Mr. & Mrs.	*Voulgaris,George(Jackie),Mr. & Mrs.
Scarfogliero,Alexis,Mrs.	Vourloumis,Joanna,Mrs.
Schatzline,Noah(Emily),Mr. & Mrs.	Vourvopoulos,George(Elena),Mr. & Mrs.
Scourtes,Christine,Mrs.	*Voykin,David(Amy),Mr. & Mrs.
Serbanos,Michael(Patricia),Mr. & Mrs.	*Voykin,Mary H,Mrs.
Shanahan,Tyler,Mr.	Vukmer,Daniel(Sheila),Mr & Mrs.
Sibley,Russell(Despina),Mr. & Mrs.	Ward,Gary(Pappas,Sandra,Ms.),Mr.
*Skijus,Alexander,Mr.	Wenditz,Michael(Amy),Mr. & Mrs.
Smith,Jonathan Wain(Hartzler/Smith,Jamie,Mrs.),Mr.	Wernke,Matthew(Kasey),Mr. & Mrs.
*Smith,Thomas(Alexopoulos,Golfo,Dr.),Dr.	*Westmoreland,Jim(Joanne),Mr. & Mrs.
Sotiropoulos,Bill,Mr.	Whallen,Petrina,Ms.
Sotiropoulos,Paul(Terri),Mr. & Mrs.	Willis,Andrew(Georgiades,Asimina,Dr.),Dr.
Soublis,Peggy,Ms.	Wilsmann,Ione,Mrs.
Spanos,Michael(Jerry),Mr. & Mrs.	Worley,Christene,Ms.
Speegle,Maria(Gary),Mrs.	Xenick,Emanuel(Maria),Mr. & Mrs.
Spencer,Wayne(Pauline),Mr. & Mrs.	Xenick,George(Cindy),Mr. & Mrs.
Spillis,John(Kalamaras Spillis,Angela,Mrs.),Mr.	Xeroteris,Evangeline,Ms.
Spinola,Stephen(Tara),Mr. & Mrs.	Zabetakis, Maria, Ms.
Spithoyanis,Michael,Mr.	*Zaharis,Constantine(Rachel),Dr & Dr.
Spring,Mellisa,Ms.	Zelatis,John P.(Denise M.),Mr. & Mrs.
*Stamas,Nicholas(Taylor),Mr. & Mrs.	Zervos,Demetri,Mr.
Stamitoles,Peter,Mr.	Zessis,Roger,Mr.

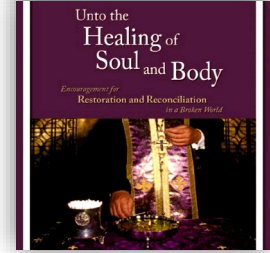
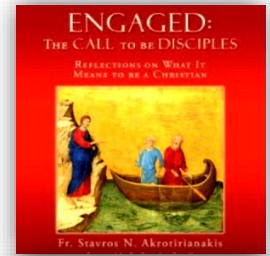
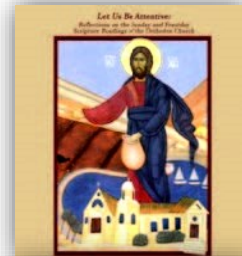
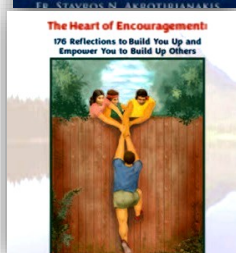
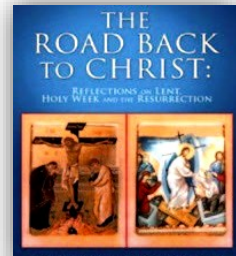
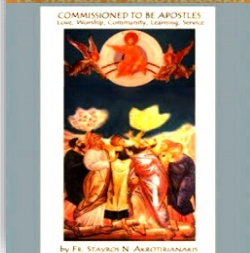
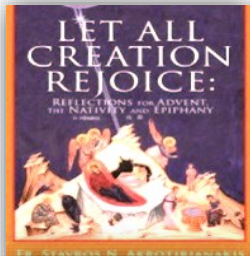
## FR. STAVROS NEW BOOK

FR. STAVROS NEW BOOK *"BLESSED IS THE KINGDOM"* REPUBLISHED BY ANCIENT FAITH PUBLISHING—FR. STAVROS RECENTLY HAD HIS BOOK *"BLESSED IS THE KINGDOM: REFLECTIONS ON THE DIVINE LITURGY OF ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM"* REPUBLISHED BY ANCIENT FAITH PUBLISHING. THIS BOOK HAS BEEN EDITED, UPDATED AND IMPROVED AND IS AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE THROUGH OUR OWN BOOKSTORE, OR THE ANCIENT FAITH BOOKSTORE. WITH THIS BOOK NOW IN PRINT, FR. STAVROS HAS NINE PUBLISHED BOOKS THAT ARE AVAILABLE BOTH IN THE BOOKSTORE AND ONLINE.



### **The additional 8 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  
 Unto the Healing of Soul and Body: Encouragement for Restoration and Reconciliation in a Broken World



## PARISH ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church together with BayCare Behavioral Health, 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.

### Help is available for life issues including:

- 1)Stress
- 2)Anxiety
- 3)Depression
- 4)Family discord
- 5)Marital problems
- 6)Substance abuse issues
- 7)Behavioral issues



**The service is completely confidential between parishioner and a Baycare Christian Therapist**



For over nine years, Fr. Stavros has been writing a daily reflection called "The Prayer Team." It comes out every morning at 12:30 a.m. via Constant Contact. From Monday-Friday, Father will be writing on the Post-Paschal Gospels and on Saturday-Sunday, Father is writing on the Scripture passages of each Sunday. There are 4,677 people on the Prayer Team.

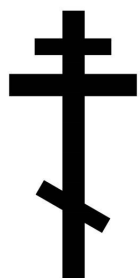


### ***INTERESTED IN JOINING THE PRAYER TEAM?***

**Over 4,677 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 our office at [office@stjohntpa.org](mailto:office@stjohntpa.org) and ask to be added. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email the office 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](mailto: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](http://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.

**In our effort to support efforts for improved mental health, our parish is proud to support the 988 suicide hotline. Spread the word and you might help save a life!**



### **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.



# PHOTO GALLERY



**“VETERAN'S APPRECIATION DAY 2024”**



## **AN AMAZING DAY of SIX CHRISMATIONS AND TWO ADULT BAPTISMS**

On Sunday,  
November 10, we  
had an amazing  
day of welcoming  
8 adults into our  
Orthodox Faith.



**“COLLEGE STUDENT LUNCHEON “**



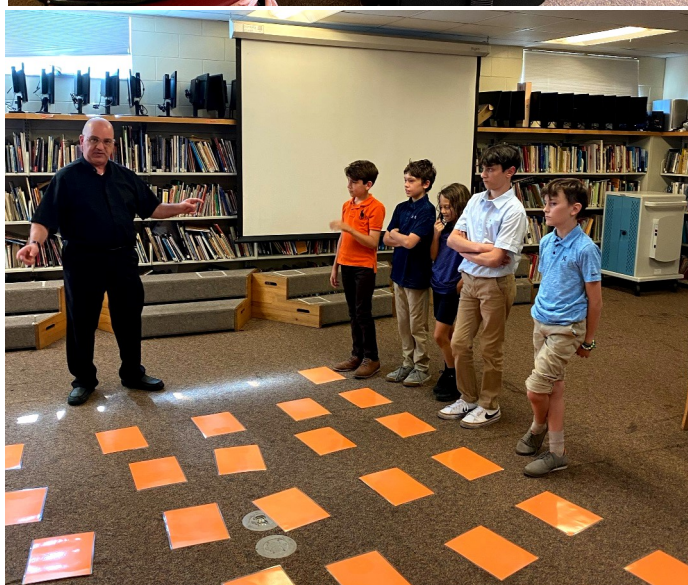


### COUNTING THE WINS

We celebrate “wins” of our community members. If something notable has happened to you or someone in your family, we’d love to share it.

Congratulations to Nicholas Akrotirianakis and the Seffner Christian High School Cross Country Team, which took 7th place out of 32 teams in their division at the State Finals for Cross Country held on **November 16** in Tallahassee.

Way to go Nicholas!



*Fr. Stavros met with our JOY Tween group on **Sunday, November 17**. They played a game of Thanksgiving memory, a Bible bingo game, and had a discussion about the importance of giving thanks every day and how to be more thankful in life.*





*Proverbs 16:3—Commit your work to the Lord; and your plans will be established.  
Psalm 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. Next month we will introduce a new word and also invite people towards the end of December to submit their word for 2025. 2024 has been quite the year, especially these past two months. Two devastating storms and a contentious election cycle have shaken a lot of people. When we decide to commit our lives to the Lord, that commitment stands at all times, in good times and difficult ones. Because to commit to something not only means to do it, but to do it all the time. I suppose two important questions to ask ourselves as we come to the end of 2024 and reflect on these external influences is, “do we want to our life to be defined based more on external forces or internal values?” and “do we commit (to God, or anything else) based more on the actions of others or our own values?” I said in the sermon the Sunday before the election that I would still show up the Sunday after as a committed Christian regardless of who won. I said the day before the hurricane that I would show up the day after as a committed Christian regardless of the damage. Do I sometimes scratch my head at the external things that happen? Yes. Do I sometimes question where is God in the midst of the chaos, why He allows certain things to happen? Yes. Do I struggle to stay committed to the Christian walk because of external influences? Yes. I most certainly do. People who commit to running or walking or working out, or just about anything else (work, family, marriage) have days when they are into it and days that are not. But they keep going, because of their sense of commitment. And that’s how faith is too. There will be days when we are really into it and days we struggle, but to commit means to stay with it, in this case, to stay with God, even on the days when it is hard, even on the days we are distracted. As 2024 is coming to a close, if you have a strong commitment to Christ, may you continue walking with good strength. And if your commitment is wavering, may you find renewed strength. Here’s the beautiful thing about commitment in relation to Christ. With so many things in life, if you break a commitment, it might cost you a relationship or a job. But with Christ, we can re-commit at any time.

+Fr. Stavros



# 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/stjohngoc Tampa/>



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, streaming 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.

#### We Are Live

We have switched from LiveStream to Vimeo as the streaming platform for our church services. You can easily access our Live and Recorded Events from the following **URL link: <https://stjohntpa.org/live/>**

This link will be included in the weekly Constant Contact Bulletin Message and is also accessible from our Church Website and SJGOC App. The sermon portion of services will continue to be shared on YouTube as recordings. Happy Streaming! Please call our Church Office with any questions.



### 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



GREEK ORTHODOX  
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA



Would you like to participate in or help with child/youth programs, events, or activities at our church? If the answer is yes, then you must register, screen, and train through the new Youth Protection platform first.

If you are interested and would like to get started or if you have questions, please contact Suzanne Pileggi at [smpileggi1@gmail.com](mailto:smpileggi1@gmail.com) or (813) 244-5855. Thank you!

## 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

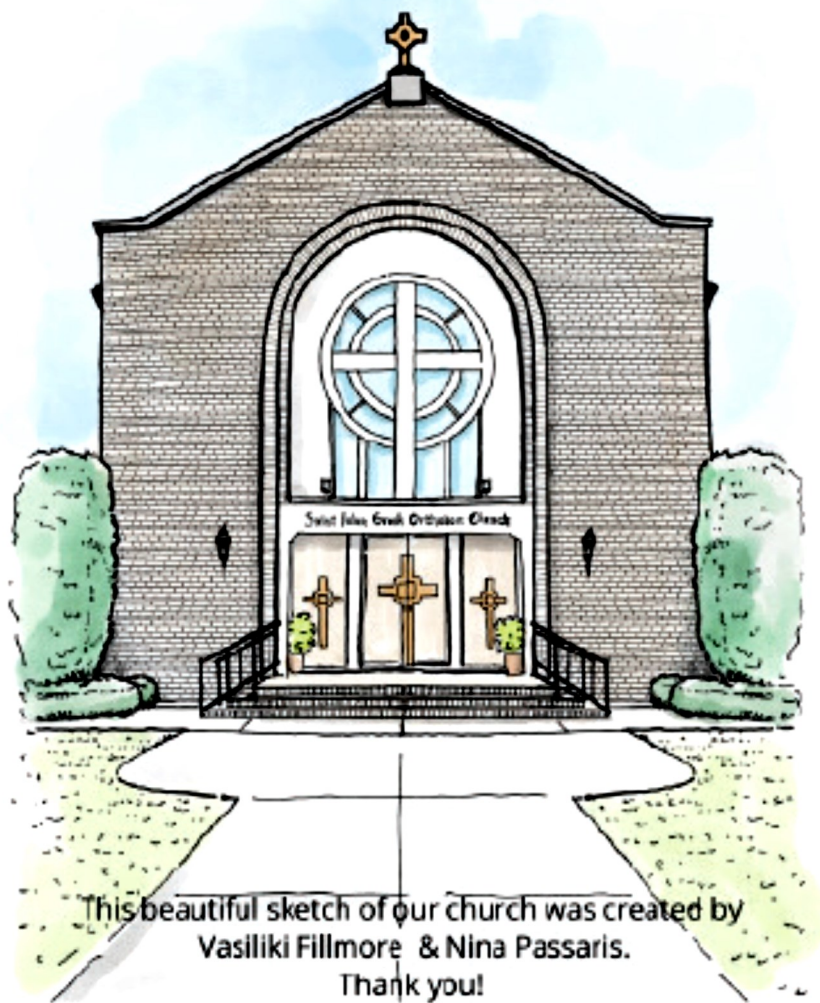
Please mail this form and check to: St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church  
2418 W. Swann Ave Tampa, FL 33609.



◀ Nov 2024		December 2024					Jan 2025 ▶
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	
<b>1 **</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Christine Scourtes 100 years event	<b>2 **</b> <u>St. Porphyrios</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	<b>3 **</b> Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	<b>4 **</b> <u>St. Barbara</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Choir 7:15 p.m.	<b>5 **</b>	<b>6 **</b> <u>St. Nicholas</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	<b>7 **</b> Young at Heart 11:30 a.m. Adult Greek School Children's Greek School	
<b>8 **</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Philoptochos Bake sale DOP-Yiayia Table GOYA 5:00 p.m.	<b>9 **</b> <u>St. Anna</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	<b>10 **</b> Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	<b>11 **</b> Paraklesis 6:00 p.m. Choir 7:15 p.m.	<b>12 **</b> <u>St. Spyridon</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Young Adult Discussion 7:00p.m.	<b>13 **</b>	<b>14 **</b> Sunday School Christmas Program rehearsal Adult Greek School	
<b>15 **</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Christmas Pageant Parish Council Elections Philoptochos bake sale DOP-Yiayia Table Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	<b>16 **</b> Christmas Candlelight Liturgy-Memorial Service Orthros 5:00 p.m. Liturgy 6:00 p.m.	<b>17 **</b> Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	<b>18 **</b> Orthros 9:15 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Choir 7:15 p.m.	<b>19 **</b> Orthros 9:15 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. College Student Night 6:30p.m.	<b>20 **</b> Orthros 6:15 a.m. Liturgy 7:00 a.m.	<b>21 **</b> Orthros 9:15 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. AHEPA Program Community Outreach Children's Greek School	
<b>22 **</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. <b>No Sunday school</b>	<b>23 **</b> Royal Hours of Nativity 9:30 a.m.	<b>24 **</b> Vespers Liturgy 9:00 a.m. Orthros 5:30 p.m. Liturgy 7:00 p.m. <b>Office closed</b>	<b>25</b> <u>Nativity of Christ</u> Orthros 8:45 a.m.. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	<b>26</b> No Fasting 12/26-1/4	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	
<b>29</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. <b>No Sunday School</b>	<b>30</b> <u>St. Anysia</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	<b>31</b>	<b>Turkey gift cards – philoptochos – all month Boxes of Hope 11/17-12/15 Toys for Tots – Veterans **Fast Day</b>				

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX  
CHURCH 2418 W. SWANN AVENUE  
TAMPA, FL 33609-4712  
OFFICE: (813) 876-8830  
FAX: (813) 443-4899  
OFFICE@STJOHNTPA.ORG  
WWW.STJOHNTPA.ORG

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*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*