



ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

— THE MESSENGER —

HAPPY NEW YEAR! *JANUARY 2025* **ΚΑΛΗ ΧΡΟΝΙΑ!**



THE THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST — JANUARY 6

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.

Parish Priest

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

Retired Priest in Residence

Rev. Fr. Stratton Dorozenski 813-876-8830 (Office)

Retired Priest in Residence

Rev. Fr. John Stefero
813-876-8830 (Office) 678-637-4425 (Cell)
jwstefero50@hotmail.com

Ministry Coordinator/Chanter

Maria Xenick
Mariapxenick@stjohntpa.org 813-765-3587(Cell)

Parish Council

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

Office Staff

Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper
debbie@stjohntpa.org 813-443-4899(fax)

Elli Kehagias, Administrative

Assistant, office@stjohntpa.org 813-876-8830

Adopt a College Student

Kathy Kaburis 813-240-6513

Adult Greek School

Magda Myer 813-523-5771

AHEPA

James Sakaris, President 301-529-8857

Altar Angels

Kalliope Chagaris 813-789-4134

Altar Boys

Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Bookstore

Presbyteria Denise Stefero 678-464-4833

Bible Study-Tuesday Night

Fr. John Stefero 678-637-4425

Buildings & Grounds

Euripides Panos 813-352-3972

Choir

Tara Swartzbaugh, Director 813-313-0439
Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782
Maria Xenick, Chanter 813-765-3587

College Student Program

Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Community Outreach

Greg Melton 813-967-2074

**Connect Through Christ -
Special Needs Ministry for Children**

Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534

Dance Groups

H XAPA MAS,
Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668
Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963
IIAPEA,
Marina Choundas 813-877-6136
IIANHFYPI,
Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668

Daughters of Penelope

Ourania Stephanides 813-546-4711

Festival

Mike Xenick 813-340-8737

Finance Committee

Gary Ward 813-846-3898

Food Pantry

Sandra Pappas 813-785-3747

Gasparilla Parking

Volunteer Needed

GOYA

Michael & Bessie Palios 813-523-0346

Hope/Joy

George & Zackie Ameres 813-245-3813

Joy Tweens

Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963

Junior Olympics

Dwight Forde 561-310-5034

Men's Fellowship

Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Parish Nursing Ministry

Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026

Oratorical Festival

Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

Photography Ministry

Karina Findlay 813-476-9632

Philotochos

Katherine Sakkis 813-309-1073

Stewardship

George Mitseas 813-748-1220

Sunday School

Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102

Usher

Pete Trakas 813-505-2193

Veterans/1st Responders

Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830

**Website / Social Media / APP
VOLUNTEER NEEDED!**

Welcoming Ministry

Maria Xenick 813-765-3587

Women's Bible Study

Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Young Adult

Aris Rogers 813-309-5525

Young at Heart

Dora Morgan 813-613-3738

Youth Protection

Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855

**12 Disciples
VOLUNTEER NEEDED!**

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRIEST

WORD OF THE YEAR 2025: BUILD

Happy New Year! Every year for the past many years, we have chosen a word to define our year as a parish. And with that, we've asked our parishioners to submit a word to define their year. The benefit of choosing one word is that it is easy to remember and check in with. It is not a list of resolutions that we will struggle to remember and struggle even more to keep. It is literally one word. For the year 2025, the word for our parish is BUILD.

As a verb, BUILD has two meanings. The first is to construct something, like you would BUILD a house or a highway. The second is to make something stronger, like BUILD on a relationship or BUILD up someone's confidence. As concerns our parish, we want to utilize both of these definitions this year.

Let's begin with the second definition, to BUILD on a relationship or to BUILD up someone's confidence. The main goal of every parish is to BUILD on our relationship with Christ. Whether we are beginning to BUILD or BUILDing on an already solid foundation, this is a work that never really ends. The beginning of the calendar year is a great time to assess our relationship with God, what might need repairing, what might need expanding, and what is going well that we can BUILD upon. We are fortunate in the Orthodox Church that the liturgical calendar affords additional opportunities each year to make this kind of assessment, whether it is the period of Great Lent, or the Nativity fast. Sticking with the new calendar year, it is a good time to make goals on what you'd like to BUILD on as far as our faith goes. It is a good time to set goals for how we will pray, what our plan for reading Scripture will be, to make a commitment to worship regularly, to consider how intensely we will fast, to commit to a stewardship pledge, among other spiritual practices.

To BUILD on relationship with God will have as a collateral benefit, to BUILD up our self-confidence. Spiritual confusion and uncertainty, doubt, and falling to temptation tear away at our confidence. Investing time to learn what we believe, investing effort to practice what we believe, and investing discipline to remain focused on our practice of Orthodoxy are the keys to building up confidence.

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY AS A PUZZLE



I spoke with a group of college students recently and when I asked them what the biggest challenges were to worshipping, they mentioned that it is boring, it is the same each time we do it. Fair enough. I mentioned to them that when one puts together a puzzle, before they actually start putting the puzzle together, they pour out the pieces and the first thing they do is flip them over and get them all on the right side. Next, they begin grouping the pieces according to edge pieces and center pieces, and further they group the pieces by color. Next, they begin to put the edge pieces together, and only after this, they put the center pieces together. It is a process. Throughout the process, they look at the puzzle box to see the picture they are putting together. Imagine how hard it would be to do a puzzle if you had no idea what the final picture was supposed to look like. Or imagine getting only a quick look at the box one time. I know from putting puzzles together, I look at the box frequently to get an idea of what pieces should go where.

BUILDing a relationship with God is a lot like doing a puzzle. In the beginning stages, it's about getting the pieces prepared and separated and then the building starts. That's why we might not see progress right away, because it takes time to put the whole puzzle together. And that's also why we can't be satisfied with an elementary school level of understanding about God, because at that level, it's like having all the pieces on the table but not connecting any of them. It's like saying "God is good," but then not taking that any further.

If there was a puzzle that depicted the life of Christ, in the center would be the Resurrection, the Crucifixion, the Nativity, Theophany and Pentecost. These events are central to our faith. The Nativity, which we just celebrated, was the Incarnation of the Son of God in the flesh. It got Jesus down to earth to be with us. Theophany, which we will celebrate January 6, was the revelation of the Holy Trinity and the endorsement of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. The Crucifixion was where Jesus balanced the equation that was unbalanced at the Fall of mankind. The consequence of the Fall was death to all human beings. Jesus suffered death as well. However, the

result of His death was the Resurrection, not consignment into Hades. And this paves the way for us to the Resurrection as well. Pentecost was the beginning of the Church.

Imagine that these images are in the center of a large puzzle. On the top of the puzzle are all scenes from the ministry of Jesus. We see Him preaching, healing, counseling. We see Him showing compassion on the sick, the downcast, the forgotten. We see Him praising the widow who gave everything she had, even though it only added up to a couple of coins, while everyone made fun of her. We see Him gently guiding a young man who boasted that he had kept all the commandments, that the man needed to sell what he had if he wanted to be perfect. We see Jesus stop at a tree and see Zacchaeus, a tax collector who was rich in money but poor in faith, and how Jesus said He needed to come to his house that very day, because His mission was to seek and to save the lost and the lost person in Jericho that day was Zacchaeus. We see Jesus telling the Parable of the Great Banquet, telling the disciples that they were to go to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, so that His house would be full.

In the middle and working toward the bottom of the puzzle, we would see scenes from church history. We would see dynamic preachers like St. Paul and St. John Chrysostom. We would see theologians arguing at Ecumenical Councils. We would see philanthropists like St. Basil building hospitals and tending to the sick and the poor. We would see martyrs like St. Katherine and St. Barbara, suffering painful deaths as witness to their faith. We would see quiet ascetics like St. Anthony and St. Savas, toiling away in prayer and in spiritual struggle. We would see people eagerly preaching Christ. We would see people falling down in sin and getting up in repentance. We would see people building churches, priests getting ordained, people getting married, dances and youth events. And we would see scenes from the history of our own parish of St. John the Baptist. We would see the founding in 1956, followed by the building of the church, the priests who have served here and the people who have passed through.

**OUR PIECE OF THE PUZZLE —
THE ARISE AND BUILD
PROJECT**

Beneath the bottom of the puzzle, we would see a bunch of pieces that have not yet been put into the puzzle. In fact, these pieces would be white, with no images on

them yet. These pieces represent our future, what we will BUILD on to the puzzle of the past that has already been put together. Which brings us to the year 2025, and the inauguration of a

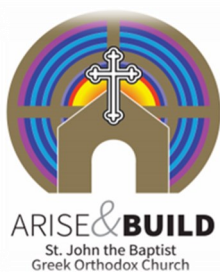


Capital Campaign called “**Arise and BUILD.**” Actually the campaign has been underway for a while. We’ve spent the better part of a year developing ideas for what we want to see for the future of our parish. We’ve taken surveys, we’ve done due diligence on what can be done with our property and what should be done. We’ve made the decision that beginning in July 2025, we will utilize our church property on a full-time basis and will no longer have the school as a tenant on our campus. We’ve spoken to architects and engineers on how we can feasibly expand our church sanctuary, preserving what we have and adding to it, rather than starting over with an entirely new building. We’ve done a site plan that includes:

- ◆ Remodeling the two-story building into a ministry building, which will house our offices and classrooms, will have additional meeting spaces, and will allow ministry to take place every day.
- ◆ We will demolish the current administration/office building because it is on its last legs and is falling apart. In its place, we will create more parking, some outdoor green space and a covered pavilion. We will also move and update the playground.
- ◆ As for the church sanctuary, we will add to the sides of it, so that we can accommodate all of our worshippers on a Sunday, and won’t have people worshipping in the Kourmolis Center. We will also add a proper narthex with a bathroom. Outside the church, we will have appropriate accessible ramps to accommodate those who cannot walk up stairs.
- ◆ The Kourmolis Center will get a needed facelift, updating the kitchen and bathrooms.
- ◆ And the grounds will get a makeover, with new asphalt, fencing, and landscaping.

The capital campaign to raise the funds for this project has been quietly underway for the past couple of months. We are already nearly 30% of our way to our goal and we’ve only just scratched the surface.

Let’s go back to the images on the puzzle though. Because the **Arise and BUILD** project is not just





about buildings and updates to our physical plant. It is about what we will do with the buildings and updates. On the puzzle we will paint an image of 500 people worshipping in the church, instead of 300. There will be a picture of people playing basketball and enjoying fellowship under a covered pavilion. There will be images of people sitting and reading in a Prayer Garden. Children playing on the playground. In the quiet corners of the church, priests will be sitting and hearing confessions. In the ministry building, seminars and support groups will meet, including not only our parishioners but people from the surrounding community that we will invite to join us. In the classrooms, there will be Sunday school lessons on Sundays, and Bible studies, youth ministries and adult ministries on other days. People will get in their cars in the parking lot renewed, refreshed and refocused.

The **Arise and BUILD** project is not an indictment of our past. Far from it. We honor our ancestors in this project in two ways. First, we preserve the church that they built for us. The altar and icon screen of the church will remain the same. Almost every icon will be preserved. And second, we take a turn with the same courage and determination that they had to leave something for our children, in the same way that they left for us what we have received. We will **BUILD** on what they did for the next generation.

The **Arise and BUILD** slogan comes from the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. The Children of Israel were exiled to Babylon for many generations. And when the exile ended, they returned to Jerusalem and found their city in ruins. The Prophet Nehemiah arose from the people and said



*“Let us arise and **BUILD!**” So they strengthened their hands for the good work. (Nehemiah 2:18)*

Our parish is not in ruins. However, it needs some updating. First, it cannot accommodate all those who want to worship. Second, we need some updating to our existing buildings and grounds. And third, and this is the most important, our focus on our mission to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, utilizing our core values of Love, Worship, Community, Learning and Service, must continue to evolve. As our understanding of the Gospel comes into clearer focus, we know that the mission of the church, and the scenes we must paint on the puzzle are not about self-preservation, but of advancing the Gospel of Jesus Christ on a full-time basis. There should not be images of collecting rent checks on the puzzle. This has never been part of the history of the Church or the spreading of the faith.

The **Arise and BUILD** project will commence in the summer of 2025. The campaign to raise funds has already begun but will kick into high gear this spring. There is a piece of the puzzle with each of our names on it. It is time to consider what will be painted on your piece. One thing we know for certain, a puzzle that is missing a piece, is incomplete. We need everyone to participate in this project, whether you donate \$1M or \$1, that does not matter. It is time for us to **Arise and BUILD** on the foundation given to us over these past nearly 70 years, and to shape the course of our parish, and the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Tampa for many years to come.

There will be a lot of additional information to be shared in the coming weeks and months. I wanted to dedicate my first message of the New Year to sharing this good news with you about the **Arise and BUILD** project, which will be the focus of this year and the years that follow.

Praying for you and your family to have a happy, health and blessed New Year!

+Fr. Stavros



ASK FATHER

Q. There are four flags flying in front of our church. I recognize the American flag, the Greek flag and the flag for the State of Florida. What is the fourth flag?

A. The fourth flag is the flag of the Byzantine Empire. It is also the flag of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople. Our Archdiocese is under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The flags outside of our church reflect our identity as Americans, as Greeks (we are the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America), as Floridians, and as spiritual children of the Church of Constantinople. As for the flag itself, the double-headed eagle represents the Byzantine Empire's dominion over both East and West, as well as the intertwining of the Orthodox Church with the Byzantine State. The yellow/gold color symbolizes wealth, power and the divine right to rule, which the black color emphasizes the regal nature of the Byzantine Empire. Even though the Byzantine Empire fell in 1453, our Church evolved under the Byzantine Empire which lasted from 325-1453. During this time, most of the Traditions of our church were developed through the Seven Ecumenical Councils, and much of our practices of the faith, from liturgical to architectural and so many other things have their roots in the Byzantine Empire.



Q. How often should I go to confession?

A. We have been blessed with a large number of people who joined our parish in 2024, who converted from other Christian denominations or were baptized. **There were 24.** Many of our new members arrived at Orthodoxy having done a lot of reading, a lot more than people who have been Orthodox their entire lives. And one thing that comes up very quickly in study of our faith is the **Sacrament of Confession.** This has led to a large uptick in the number of confessions being heard at St. John, which is a great thing. It also has led to some confusion as to how often one should receive this sacrament. The answer varies by Orthodox

jurisdiction. In the Slavic churches, confession is a requirement in order to receive Holy Communion. It is not uncommon for confessions to be heard on Saturday evenings after a vespers service (*it is not our custom at St. John to have vespers on Saturdays, but it is the custom in many Orthodox churches*) or on a Sunday morning before the Divine Liturgy. In these instances, confessions are not only frequent, but they are brief. The encounter with the priest might last only a few seconds, just like the encounter at Holy Communion lasts only a few seconds. People will come up, offer their sins of the week and then the priest will do a prayer of absolution over everyone who has confessed at the same time. This process could take a total of 30 minutes or even less for an entire congregation. This is not the way confession is handled in the Greek Orthodox Church. The practice in our church is for less frequent confession and for the encounter to be a dialogue between priest and penitent. In other words, someone comes and confesses their sins, something which should actually take just a couple of minutes, and then there is a conversation about how to plan going forward to fight better in the struggle against them. I tell people that we should handle confession the way we handle going to the doctor. We go to the doctor in times of acute illness and also once a year for an annual check-up. People should go to confession once a year, to discuss sin, repentance, and even questions on the faith. And then people should go in between if they have fallen into a serious sin. When you go to confession, the frequency of how often you should go is a good thing to discuss with the priest. My spiritual father has outlined a plan for how often I should go and I follow it.

If you have a question you'd like Fr. Stavros to address in the Messenger, please email it to frstav@gmail.com



A MESSAGE FROM OUR MINISTRY COORDINATOR

GOD'S VARIED GRACE

1 Peter 4:9-11 ESV

⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of **God's varied grace**. ¹¹ 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 "...God's varied grace..."

Isn't it interesting that St. Peter's chooses to identify God's grace as "*varied*"? The old King James version says "*manifold grace*." The New International Version says "*grace in all its forms*."

Let's think about that word grace for a moment. The Greek word *χάρις* (*charis*), often translated "grace", more accurately means something given freely. Although the New Testament usually uses it that way in reference to God, it's basic meaning in Greek was something like unmerited favor or goodwill. In other words, you give someone kindness, consideration, respect, even love, all those things, whether they deserve it or not. That is grace.

Of course, there is another use of this word, too, closely tied to our salvation in Jesus Christ. "*By grace we have been saved through faith, this is not of our own doing, it is a gift of God. It is not because of 'works,' lest anyone should boast.*" (Ephesians 2:8-9) It's that same unmerited or undeserved favor of God when He forgives us.

And because of God's grace to us, we are to be gracious. Let that sentence soak in a bit - we are to be gracious people. Can you think of someone in your life that you could describe as a gracious person? What does that look like? At its core, it means we are to be people who give kindness, love, and respect to others, whether they deserve it or not. And is that easy? No, it's not!

God calls us to be such people. Perhaps one of the reasons He does is that gracious people are compelling. Isn't that true? People want to be

around them. And gracious people reflect that grace of God.

By our grace, we demonstrate God's grace. So, if we expect people to respond to God's grace, we need to be people of grace – God's varied grace – in all its forms. God is gracious to us in the giving of gifts and abilities, He has also, in His infinite wisdom varied His gift giving grace so that He may best be served and glorified. The primary purpose for all God's graciousness is that He would be glorified. Not only has God varied His grace in the gifts that He gives, but also in the ways we desire to use those gifts.

So then, as Peter says, when you are being a person who gives love, respect, and kindness – no matter whether or not a person earns it or deserves it – you are being a steward of God's varied grace. And when you do that, other people are likely to be in a better mindset to receive the grace of God!

When we see the varied grace as being of God, and we see it as the precious gift that it is, then we choose to be the people of grace. So let us make that decision today to be people of grace – grace in all its forms.

Maria

(Thank you to Skip Brecht of Eddington Presbyterian Church for permission to use part of his article.)

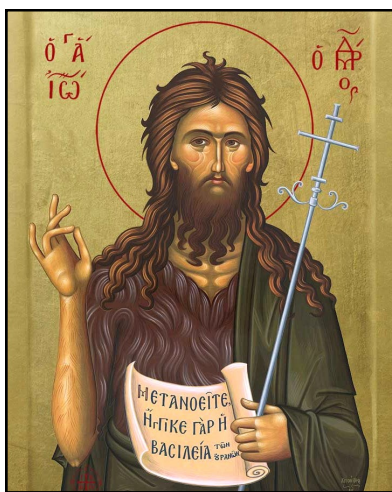


LITURGICAL SCHEDULE FOR JANUARY

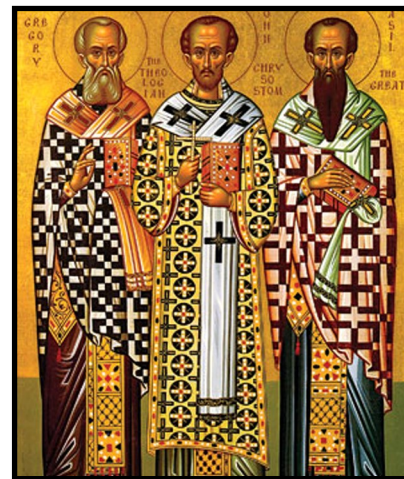
Wednesday, January 1	<u>ST. BASIL (NEW YEAR'S DAY)</u>		
	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00a.m.
Sunday, January 5	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00a.m.
	Blessing of the Waters	11:15a.m.	
Monday, January 6	Vespers-St. John the Baptist		6:30p.m.
Tuesday, January 7	<u>ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST</u>		
	Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00a.m.
Sunday, January 12	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00a.m.
Wednesday, January 15	Paraklesis	6:00p.m.	
Friday, January 17	<u>ST. ANTHONY</u>		
	Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00a.m.
Sunday, January 19	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00a.m.
Sunday, January 26	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00a.m.
Tuesday, January 28	<u>ST. JAMES THE ASCETIC</u>		
	Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00a.m.
Thursday, January 30	<u>SYNAXIS OF THE THREE HIERARCHS</u>		
	Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00a.m.
Sunday, February 2	<u>PRESENTATION OF CHRIST</u>		
	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00a.m.
Monday, February 3	Teaching Divine Liturgy as part of Orthodoxy 101 Class		6:30-8:30p.m.
Thursday, February 6	<u>ST. PHOTIOS</u>		
	Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00a.m.



ST. BASIL, THE GREAT— JANUARY 1



ST. JOHN, THE BAPTIST— JANUARY 7



SYNAXIS OF THE THREE HIERARCHS—
JANUARY 30

LITURGICAL NOTES FOR JANUARY

Wednesday, January 1 - The Circumcision of Christ/St. Basil - New Year's Day – Three things are commemorated on the first day of each year. First, the circumcision of Christ, which occurred historically 8 days after His Nativity. He was circumcised according to the rites of the Jewish law and given the name Jesus. Secondly, we commemorate the feast of St. Basil the Great, one of the Great Hierarchs of our church. St. Basil authored one of the Divine Liturgies used in our church, which is celebrated on his feast day. He also helped found monasticism. St. Basil was a friend to the poor, often baking bread with money in it and throwing it through the windows of widows and the poor. Hence the tradition of the Vasilopita, the bread with the coin baked inside, which we cut at the New Year. Finally, we are supposed to pray every day and commemorate all of life's milestones with prayer. So, we open a new year, 2024, with prayer and the Divine Liturgy.

The Feast of Theophany – The Feast of Theophany commemorates several things: First, and most well-known, it commemorates the Baptism of Christ. Christ was baptized in the Jordan River by St. John the Baptist. Second, at the moment of His descent into the River, the Jordan River reversed its course, and all of Creation changed its course with the presence of the Christ. Third, the Holy Trinity was made manifest for the first time in human history, as the Son of God was in the water, the Holy Spirit hovered over as a dove, and the voice of God was heard. The feast of the Theophany is the manifestation of God, as well as the Baptism of Christ. The name "Epiphany" refers to the enlightenment of the world. After the Divine Liturgy, there is a service called the Blessing of Waters during which water is blessed and sprinkled over the church and over the people as a way to renew and reconsecrate ourselves on this feast day. There is a beautiful and powerful prayer that is offered only on January 5 and 6, asking God to reconsecrate the world.

Monday, January 6 - Great Vespers of St. John the Baptist - 6:30 p.m. – The Vespers Service is the service that begins the liturgical day. In our church, the day begins at sundown. Thus the feast of St. John the Baptist, celebrated on January 7, begins with the sunset of January 6. Properly celebrated, all feast days should begin with the celebration of Great Vespers, including every Sunday which should begin with Great Vespers on Saturday evenings. Because this is not practical in most parishes, Great Vespers is celebrated in most parishes on a limited basis. We will, of course, celebrate the complete cycle of services related to our feast day of St. John, which will begin with Great Vespers.

Tuesday, January 7 - St. John the Baptist – The day after a major feast day often commemorates the secondary figure of the Feast. On January 6, we celebrate the Baptism/Epiphany of Christ, who is obviously the major figure. The secondary figure of that feast is St. John the Baptist, whose feast day we commemorate the next day, January 7. St. John is the LAST of the Prophets before Christ and the first of the Saints, those who believed in Christ. Righteous figures who came before Christ are called either "Righteous" or "Prophet." Holy People who came after Christ are called Saints. St. John the Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist, as both titles.

Wednesday, January 15 - Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary – We will continue to offer Paraklesis once a month, so that we can pray for all the members of our community by name, out loud. We will alternate some in the evening and some in the morning. For January, the Paraklesis will be offered on Wednesday evening, January 15, from 6:00-7:00 p.m.

Friday, January 17 - St. Anthony – St. Anthony is recognized as one of the fathers of monasticism. He lived in the late 3rd and early 4th centuries. He founded a monastery in Egypt which still exists to this day. He authored many of the monastic rules that are still in practice today. He also was a major contributor to the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea in 325, where the Nicene Creed was first authored. He was one of the leaders against the heresies of Arianism.

January 28 - St. James the Ascetic – St. James the Ascetic lived in the 4th century. For fifteen years he lived the life of an ascetic on a cave near a village called Porphyrianos. Once there was a prostitute who, moved by lecherous men, came to see the saint. She jumped on him shamelessly and was inciting him to sin. But the saint reminded her of the future punishment of eternal fire, making her repent and come to Christ. Another time, a nobleman who had a daughter possessed by demons offered her to the saint for healing. The saint prayed and immediately freed her from the demon. The girl's father, though, was afraid that the demon would disturb her again, and so he left her and her young brother in the cave of the saint. Unfortunately, the saint was defeated by desire and slept with the maiden. He then became afraid that his abhorrent sin would be revealed, so he killed the woman and her brother and threw their dead bodies in the nearby river. Thus, he despaired completely of his salvation and made haste to return to the world. But on his way he met a pious monk. The saint obeyed this monk's advice: he shut himself in a grave where he suffered every kind of hardship and torment. Some time later, when the land suffered from drought and lack of rain, God ordered the bishop of the city that unless James who was shut in the grave prayed, the dry spell would not end. Then the bishop together with all the people went to the saint, begged and finally convinced him to pray for them. As soon as he prayed there came a heavy rain. From this sign the saint received good hope about his salvation. In this way he commended his soul into the hands of God. The story of St. James is inspiring because he is another example of someone who committed grave sin but found salvation. His story gives hope to all of us.

Thursday, January 30 - The Three Hierarchs – The Three Hierarchs are St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom. Each had his own feast day and all are honored together on January 30, ironically because of a controversy over which was the greatest. (Imagine a church meeting where we debated which saints were the most important!) Each of them lived in the 4th Century, each was an accomplished writer and speaker, each was a Bishop, each authored a Liturgy and each is remembered prominently in the history of our church to this day. The Three Hierarchs are Patron Saints of Teachers and Education.

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



COMMUNITY NEWS

Tuesday night Bible study with Fr. John – Will continue meeting at 6:30 p.m. on most Tuesday evenings. Join us in person or via zoom for some very informative, lively and interactive discussions on how we apply Biblical principles in our everyday lives. See the Sunday bulletin for specific topics. For January, the dates are Tuesdays, January 7, 14, 21, 28.

Women's Bible Study – Women's Bible Study meets on most Tuesday mornings with Fr. Stavros from 10:00-11:30 a.m. either in person or on zoom. We are studying the Epistle of First and Second Peter. For January the dates are Tuesday, January 14, 21 and Monday, January 27.

Young Adults- Our young adult group meets once a month for dinner/discussion (and other times for fellowship and service). The meeting for January will be on Thursday, January 9, from 7:00-9:00 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. 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 January will be a Bible study on the feast of Theophany and St. John the Baptist. Group Members use What's App for communication.

Sunday School Teachers' Seminar, January 11 – On Saturday, January 11, from 9:00am-12:00pm, there will be a seminar for all Sunday school teachers.

Meeting of Ministry Heads, Monday, January 13 – On Monday, January 13, there will be a meeting of ministry heads from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Each ministry head is requested to attend and other members of each ministry are invited to attend. If the ministry head cannot attend, please ask someone else in your ministry to attend, so that all ministries are represented.

Philoptochos Vasilopita Sunday January 19 – We will cut the Vasilopita for our various ministries at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, January 19. The Philoptochos will also be offering pieces of Vasilopita as part of coffee hour. Any proceeds from this day will be going to St. Basil's Academy in New York.

Men's Group – Our men's group will meet on Sunday, January 19 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 January will be "Setting Spiritual Goals for the New Year" and we will also discuss the Feast of Theophany and life of St. John the Baptist. Please mark down the following dates for our men's group for spring of 2025: Sunday, January 19

Men's Retreat – Saturday, February 8, from 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. The topic will be "Growing in Christ This Upcoming Lenten Season." Sunday, March 9; Sunday, May 4.

The GOYA Meeting for January will be Sunday, January 12 from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be served.

Clearwater Event January 24-26-- The GOYA Clearwater Winter Event will be held January 24-26 at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Clearwater. Those in GOYA will be receiving details for how to sign up to attend.

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.

Prayer for Teachers on Sunday, January 26— On January 26, we celebrate the feast of the Three Hierarchs, who are also the patron saints of teachers. At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, we will offer a prayer for all teachers and anyone who works in education in our community.

Parish Council Elections— On Sunday, December 15— We held our elections for the Parish Council. Congratulations to John Carter, George Chagaris, Marilyn Sandborn Alexis Scarfogliero and John Zelatis who were elected to serve on the Parish Council. Thank you for Amin Hanhan who has served for 7 years on the Parish Council and to Rip Panos, who served for 5, who have served with distinction, as they leave their time on the PC.

My One Word 2025— For the past several years, we have asked parishioners to send in one word to define their year. We are collecting the words by **January 15**. Please email yours to mariapxenick@stjohntpa.org by January 15.

Save the Weekend for a Very Special Event in the Life of our Parish— The Ordination of Alex Limberatos to the Diaconate and the Priesthood— February 15-16. His Eminence Metropolitan Sevastianos of Atlanta will visit our parish the weekend of February 15-16 and will ordain Alex Limberatos, our former pastoral assistant, to the Diaconate (Saturday, February 15) and to the Priesthood (February 16). Divine Liturgy and an ordination will be held on both of those mornings. More information will be forthcoming.



INSPIRATION

God Is Talking To You My Child...

You may not know me, but I know everything about you...**Psalm 139:1**

I know when you sit down and when you rise up...**Psalm 139:2**

I am familiar with all your ways...**Psalm 139:3**

Even the very hairs on your head are numbered...**St. Matthew 10:29-31**

For you were made in my image...**Genesis 1:27**

To be Continued...

~The ability to speak several languages is a great asset, but the ability to keep your mouth shut in any language is priceless.~

*If the face of a loved one clearly and completely changes us, and makes us cheerful, joyful and carefree, what will the Face of the Lord not do when HE makes His presence felt invisibly in a pure soul? ~
St. John Climacus, in the Ladder of Divine Ascent*

*Baptism is the washing away of evils that were in us before, but sins committed after baptism are washed away by tears. ~
St. John Climacus*

*The first to apologize is the **bravest**.
The first to forgive is the **strongest**.
And the first to forget is the **happiest**.*

***Marriage isn't.** . I promise to love you until I stop loving you.
Marriage is. . I promise to choose to love you even when it's hard, because I'm aware no one is perfect. . .but you are worth it!*

TEN COMMANDMENTS OF MARRIAGE

1. Speak softly and listen carefully.
2. Be each other's biggest cheerleader
3. Stay committed through thick and thin
4. Always have each other's back
5. Keep date night sacred
6. Teamwork makes the dream work
7. Say sorry. . .and mean it
8. Keep the spark alive
9. Talk openly about money
10. Grow together, rise together

*Rudeness is the weak man's imitation of strength. ~
Eric Hoffer*

A relationship will not prosper if you don't provide your partner with a safe and open space to express their needs and concerns. If you continue to perceive your partner's communication as an attack, you will never get anywhere. Humble yourself and listen to their needs.

"Five Practical Life Lessons You Must Always Bring with You"

1. Even when you trust someone, keep some things to yourself.
2. Your mental health is way more important than your career will ever be.
3. Be okay with people not liking you, most don't even like themselves.
4. Not everything will go according to plan, always be ready to adapt.
5. Don't waste your time stressing about things you can't control

THE TALE OF THE TWO ANGELS

Two traveling angels stopped to spend the night at a house of a rich family. The family was rude and refused the angels to stay in the guest room in the villa.

Instead, they gave the angels a small place in a cold basement. While the angels were making their beds on the hard floor, the greatest angel saw a hole in the wall and repaired it. When the smallest angel asked him why, the oldest replied: "Things are not always as they seem..."

The next night the angels went to rest in a very poor house, but the farmer and his wife were very hospitable. After sharing the little food they had, the angels fell asleep in their bed where they could have a restful night. When the sun came out, the next morning the angels found the farmer and his wife crying. Their only cow whose milk was their only income was dead on the pasture.

The smallest angel was upset and asked the bigger one how it was possible and let something like this happen.

-“The first family had everything and still you helped it... The second family had little and yet they were willing to share everything and you let the cow die... »

-“Things are not always what they seem.. ” answered the greatest angel.

“When we stayed in the basement of the villa, I noticed it was gold stored in that hole in the wall. Since the owner was so greedy and wasn't in the mood to share his good fortune, I sealed the wall so he couldn't find the gold. Last night, while we were sleeping in the farmer's bed, the angel of Death came for his wife and I gave the cow in her place. Things aren't always what they seem...”

Sometimes this is exactly what happens when things don't work out. If you have faith, you must learn to trust and believe that every outcome is always in your favor. You may not know it until much later.

Yesterday is the past.
Tomorrow is a mystery.

PARISH REGISTRY

Baptism—Ryan Adrian Radulescu, was baptized on December 6. Margareta Mihailescu and Dan Sebastian Ene were the sponsors. **Congratulations!**

Baptism—Constantine Ioannis Limberatos was baptized on December 19. Evan Limberatos was the sponsor. **Congratulations!**

REGISTRY TOTALS

	<u>2024</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2020</u>
Weddings	4	10	11	11	8
Baptisms	18	21	20	19	13
Funerals	4	6	11	9	12
Chrismations	19	7	4	4	5

*Fun fact: 2024 set the record for **Chrismations** for our parish in a single year.*

WEDDINGS, DIVORCES, BAPTISMS,
FUNERALS, MEMORIALS
AS WELL AS OFFICE, FUNDRAISERS AND
HALL USE PROCEDURES

*The Greek Orthodox Church is not a church of rules. But without some guidelines to go by, there would be chaos. The following guidelines are rooted in Orthodox Tradition and Canon Law. These guidelines are printed in **The Messenger** in the beginning of each calendar year, and it is a good idea from time to time for people to review them. These guidelines have been copied from the 2020 Yearbook of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Please review them, and keep them in mind when planning for your important life events. If you have any questions, please contact Fr. Stavros. (Special requirements specific to sacraments at St. John the Baptist appear in italics.)*

WEDDINGS

For the union of a man and woman to be recognized as sacramentally valid by the Orthodox Church, the following conditions must be met: The Sacrament of Matrimony must be celebrated by an Orthodox Priest of a canonical Orthodox jurisdiction, according to the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church, in a canonical Orthodox Church, and with the authorization of the Metropolitan.

Before requesting permission from the Metropolitan to perform the marriage, a Priest must verify that: a) Neither of the parties in question are already married to other persons, either in this country or elsewhere (if a person comes to the United States after age 18, they need to provide a letter from their country of origin that they are indeed free to marry); b) the parties in question are not related to each other to a degree that would constitute an impediment; c) if either or both parties are widowed, they have presented the death certificate(s) of the deceased spouse(s); d) if either or both of the parties have been previously married in the Orthodox Church, they have obtained an ecclesiastical as well as civil divorce. (The Ecclesiastical Divorce process is done after the civil divorce becomes final, and involves counseling with the parish priest, forms that are filled out, a review by the Metropolitan, a divorce hearing which in the Tampa Bay area is held in Clearwater, and this process usually takes several months to complete. *Fr. Stavros will not set a wedding date for anyone until an ecclesiastical divorce has been secured, so please plan accordingly, the ecclesiastical divorce process often takes several months.*) e) the party or parties who are members of a parish other than the one in which the marriage is to be performed have provided a certificate declaring them to be members in good standing with that parish for the current year; and f) a civil marriage license has been obtained from civil authorities.



No person may marry more than three times in the church, with permission for a third marriage

granted only with extreme oikonomia.

In cases involving the marriage of Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians, the latter must have been baptized in water, in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Church cannot bless the marriage of an Orthodox Christian to a non-Christian. The couple should be willing to baptize their children in the Orthodox Church and raise and nurture them in accordance with the Orthodox Faith. There is a list of religious groups that Orthodox are prohibited from marrying, i.e. Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, all non-Christians and others. Fr. Stavros can provide you with this list. **This is IMPORTANT to consider when you begin to date someone. Make sure your children are aware of this!** Because circumstances exist where a couple is dating where one of the two is not eligible to be married in the Orthodox Church, and this causes heartache in the relationship and often leads to someone leaving the church.

Fr. Stavros will not schedule a wedding for a couple where one of them is not Christian, until the non-Christian person is baptized. All too often, the situation arises where a couple asks for a wedding date to be set and one of them isn't baptized. They promise to come to church, take the Orthodox 101 class and then don't. This presents a dilemma and forces a priest essentially to do a "shot-gun" baptism, in order to satisfy a requirement so that the wedding may take place. So as not to put our priest in the awkward position to do a baptism for someone who hasn't prepared whatsoever, versus cancelling a wedding and dealing with that fallout, the wedding simply will not be scheduled until both parties present evidence that they are baptized (with at least one being Orthodox).

The same goes for someone who needs an ecclesiastical divorce. It takes several months to get an ecclesiastical divorce. Thus, a wedding will not be scheduled until the ecclesiastical divorce process has been completed. Again, because there have been cases where someone is ineligible to get married because they need an ecclesiastical divorce, the date has been scheduled, the person then does not go through the divorce process and that creates a problem. The problem is now solved, no wedding date set until the ecclesiastical divorce process has been completed.

A baptized Orthodox Christian whose wedding has not been blessed by the Orthodox Church is no longer in good standing with the Church, and may not receive the Sacraments of the Church, including Holy Communion, or become a sponsor of an Orthodox Marriage, Baptism, or Chrismation. A non-Orthodox Christian who marries an Orthodox Christian does not thereby become a member of the Orthodox Church, and may not receive the Sacraments, including Holy Communion, serve on the Parish Council or vote in parish assemblies or elections. To participate in the Church's life, one must be received into the Church by the Sacrament of Baptism, or in the case of persons baptized with water in the Holy Trinity, following a period of instruction, by Chrismation.

Canonical and theological reasons preclude the

Orthodox Church from performing the Sacrament of Marriage for couples where one partner is Orthodox and the other partner is a non-Christian. As such, Orthodox Christians choosing to enter such marriages fall out of good standing with their Church and are unable to actively participate in the sacramental life of the church. While this stance may seem confusing and rigid, it is guided by the Orthodox Church's love and concern for its member's religious and spiritual well-being.

The Sponsor (koumbaros or koumbara) must provide a current certificate of membership proving him or her to be an Orthodox Christian in good standing with the church. A person who does not belong to a parish, or who belongs to a parish under the jurisdiction of a bishop who is not in communion with the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, or who, if married, has not had his or her marriage blessed by the Orthodox Church, or, if divorced, has not received an ecclesiastical divorce, cannot be a sponsor. Non-Orthodox persons may be members of the wedding party, but may not exchange the rings or crowns.

Days when marriage is not permitted

Marriages are not performed on fast days or during fasting seasons or on the feasts of the church as indicated: September 14 (Holy Cross Day), December 13-25 (Christmas), January 5 and 6 (Epiphany), Great Lent and Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, August 1-15 (Dormition Fast) and August 29. Any exceptions can only be made with the permission of the Metropolitan. Also a wedding can only be done on a Friday, when Friday is a fast day, with the permission of the Metropolitan.

Prohibited Marriages

The following types of relationships constitute impediments to marriage:

Parents with their own children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren or Godchildren of the same Godparents; Brothers-in law and sisters-in law; Uncles and aunts with nieces and nephews; First cousins with each other; Foster parents with foster children or foster children with the children of foster parents.

Godparents with Godchildren or Godparents with the parents of their Godchildren. (In the Chrismation of an adult, one has potential marriage impediment. For any questions regarding, please see Fr. Stavros)

A date cannot be set for marriage unless one of the parties getting married, NOT THE PARENTS, contact Fr. Stavros, who sets all the dates for weddings. In order for the date to be locked in, one person in the couple has to come and meet with Fr. Stavros to go over the wedding procedures. Pre-Marital Counseling is also required for weddings at St. John the Baptist. There is a two-fold requirement. One is that the couples need to meet with Fr. Stavros for two sessions. Second, the Metropolis of Atlanta requires couples to participate in a Saturday regional premarital counseling seminar. Contact the Metropolis of Atlanta or visit the Family Life Ministry section of their website for dates in 2024. For people who wish to be married at St. John the Baptist

who are not members anywhere, a substantial fee is imposed for use of the church, it's actually rather appalling that people think they can just show up at the church, use it, and never be seen again, thus the fee to use the church for non-members. Further appalling is that non-members complain about a fee when they are spending thousands of dollars on a wedding. The fees are imposed to discourage this kind of behavior, thereby encouraging all those who wish to have the sacraments of the church to be members in good standing. Also, the Koumbaro/Koumbara for a wedding must be in good sacramental standing. If they are not members of St. John the Baptist, they must bring a letter from their parish priest saying that they are in good sacramental standing. Otherwise, there will be a fee imposed as well.

A Note on Bridesmaids Dresses

We have asked that shoulders be covered, i.e. no strapless dresses, for bridesmaids. A shawl or throw can be worn in the church and ditched for the wedding reception. ***Because this has been an issue at several weddings, we require the bridesmaids' s dresses to be approved by Fr. Stavros. A picture of someone wearing the dress will be sufficient. Should this continue to be a problem, we will look into buying something appropriate (shawls of shame) that can be placed over dresses that are inappropriate for church.***



BAPTISMS

A person who wishes to sponsor a candidate for Baptism or Chrismation must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing and a supporting member of an Orthodox parish. A person may not serve as a Godparent if the Church has not blessed his or her marriage or, if civilly divorced, he or she has not been granted an ecclesiastical divorce, or for any other reason he or she is not in communion with the Orthodox Church. Baptisms may not be performed during Holy Week, or on any of the Great Feast days of the Lord.

For people who wish to have a child baptized at St. John who are not members anywhere, a fee is imposed for use of the church, thereby encouraging all those who wish to have the sacraments of the church to be members in good standing. Also, the Godparent must be in good sacramental standing. If they are not members of St. John, they must bring a letter from their parish priest saying that they are in good sacramental standing. Otherwise, there will be a fee imposed as well.

CHRISMATIONS

When someone who has been baptized into another Christian denomination wishes to become Orthodox, they are received through the sacrament of Chrismation. There is a process by which this happens. It is easy to remember – ***five words that start with the letter C:***

Catechism – anyone wishes to be Chrismated Orthodox at St. John must complete the Orthodoxy 101 class with Fr. Stavros. It is offered each January/February and September/October. It is a four-week class held on Monday nights at the church from 6:30-8:30 p.m. There is no charge for this class.

Consistency – The catechumens (those preparing to join the church) went through a two-year period of study before they could be received into the church. Every priest is different with the policy on how long one needs to be immersed in the life of the church before they can be Chrismated. The policy at St. John is that one needs to be a regular attendee at services for a period of six months before they are Chrismated.

Comfort – A person should feel comfortable worshipping and living the other aspects of an Orthodox life before getting Chrismated.

Connection – In order to be Chrismated, one needs to have a sponsor, so a person needs to be immersed in the ministries of the church in order to be connected to someone who can fill this role.

Commitment – A person who is joining the church is expected to be a steward of the parish and fill out a stewardship form reflecting that.

HOLY COMMUNION

Holy Communion is offered in the context of the Divine Liturgy, with rare exception being when it is offered to the sick in a hospital or home (outside of the church) and when it is offered at a baptism that is not connected to the Divine Liturgy. It is not appropriate to ask after church has ended if one can receive Holy Communion because they were late (which would mean they were at least one hour late) and missed it. If you wish to receive Holy Communion, you should be present for the entirety of the Divine Liturgy. If you are not here for the Creed (the confession of faith that is the requirement of receiving Holy Communion), then you should not receive Holy Communion. (It pains me to write this paragraph – Fr. Stavros)

FUNERALS

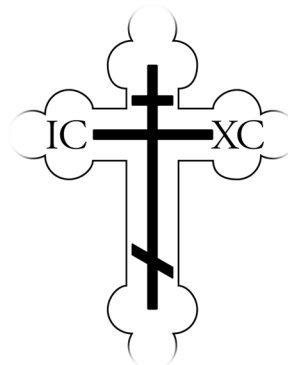
Funeral services are permitted on any day of the year, except for Sunday and Holy Friday, unless permission is granted by the Metropolitan. If you wish to have a service outside of the church, it will not be a funeral service. It will either be a Memorial Service or a Trisagion. A funeral service must be in an Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church does not allow for cremation. This is based on Ezekiel's vision of a valley of dry bones (*Ezekiel 37*) and St. Paul's writing that the Body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (*I Corinthians 6:19*) and thus must be treated with dignity even in death and allowed to return to its elements naturally. The Orthodox Church will not allow a funeral service for someone who has been cremated. Many people have mentioned in their will their desire to be cremated. Please discuss this with Fr. Stavros if there are any questions regarding this, and make the appropriate changes, because Fr. Stavros cannot grant *oikonomia* (dispensation) and do a funeral service if someone has been cremated. Further, it is the custom of the church for the casket to be open at a funeral. This shows honor for the person who is deceased and makes us aware of the reality of death.

Additionally, eulogies offered in the church at a funeral service may only be offered by an ordained

Orthodox clergyman. If members of the family wish to offer testimonials, these may be done at the funeral home the night before the funeral or at the makaria luncheon.

MEMORIALS

Memorial services may not be chanted from the Saturday or Lazarus through the Sunday of Thomas, or on any Feast day of the Lord or any Feast day of the Theotokos. We customarily do not offer memorial services on the 1st Sunday of Lent (Sunday of Orthodoxy) or the 3rd Sunday of Lent (Sunday of the Holy Cross), or the Sunday after September 14. In 2025, the Sundays when NO memorial services will be offered include: January 4; March 9 (Sunday of Orthodoxy), March 23 (Sunday of the Holy Cross); April 13 (Palm Sunday); April 20 (Pascha); April 27 (Sunday of St. Thomas); June 8 (Pentecost); September 14 (Sunday of the Holy Cross).



Memorial Services may be scheduled through the church office.

You must contact the church at least **two weeks** in advance of when you want the service. **We will not be able to accommodate a memorial service that is requested with less than two weeks notice.** That is because it takes time to make koliva (boiled wheat) and the few people who make it need time to procure the supplies and prepare it. 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. Please let the office know when you call or email whether you will be providing your own koliva or whether you wish for the Philoptochos to provide. If the Philoptochos does the koliva, there is a \$125 charge for this service-checks may be made payable to "St. John Philoptochos." 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.

ORGAN DONATION

The Orthodox Church allows the faithful to donate organs after death if they wish.

FORTY-DAY BLESSINGS

Forty-Day Blessings for babies may be done on any day. The prayers of this service connect the 40-day churching of the baby with the mother of the child (if she is Orthodox) receiving Communion. Thus, if this service is offered on a Sunday, or before any Divine Liturgy, Father Stavros schedules them at 9:30 a.m., prior to the Divine Liturgy, so that the new mother can receive Holy Communion in the context of the Divine Liturgy.

SOME GUIDELINES UNIQUE TO OUR PARISH

In line with the guidelines from the Archdiocese provided above, we also have some guidelines for things in our parish that are helpful to review as we start the new year. The Parish Council has adopted what is below with the approval of Fr. Stavros. Most of these guidelines are old, though a few of them are new. For the "Good of the Order" at our church, we ask that everyone cooperate in following these guidelines. Please read these over carefully and if you have any questions, please address them to the Parish Council or Father Stavros.



GUIDELINES

PROCEDURES FOR THE OFFICE:

- The deadline for submitting information for the weekly bulletin is **Wednesday at 12:00 p.m.** All submissions must be sent electronically to office@stjohntpa.org.
- The deadline for the Messenger shall be the **10th of the month**. If the 10th is a weekend, then please submit the **Friday before the 10th**. As a cost cutting measure we reduced the size of the Messenger, so no full page flyers will be put in. All submissions must be sent electronically via email. Simply send in your event information to officestjohngoctampa@gmail.com.
- Events may be advertised a maximum of two months prior to the event date for The Messenger and four weeks prior for the bulletin.
- **Open Office Hours and Monday - Friday 10:00 a.m. -2:00p.m. Or By Appointment Only.** If you wish to see Fr. Stavros or the office staff, you must make an appointment. Also, when meeting with the office staff, or when meeting with Father Stavros on a non-pastoral matter, please be efficient with your time. There is lots of work that goes on in the office and constant interruptions make for little progress. Planned appointments are fine, they are not interruptions.

FUNDRAISERS/HALL USAGE:

- All fundraisers and events by ministries or church affiliated groups should be scheduled at the August calendar meeting. For those, not scheduled at this meeting; please submit your event request to the Parish Council; via the office email officestjohngoctampa@gmail.com
- **Please clean up the kitchen after your event.** No food, trays, utensils, etc., should be left on the counters, sink, or drying rack. Please throw away all trash and wash all dirty dishes, trays, etc. and return to the appropriate places.
- All sales of tickets and other fundraising items, shall take place at designated tables immediately outside of the foyer and in the center of the hall. These tables will be preset for your use. Our foyer has become increasingly crowded and we need to maintain clearance per fire code.
- All contracts for caterers, bands, etc., made in the church name that obligate the church for payment shall be submitted and signed by the Parish Council.

COFFEE HOURS/FUNDRAISERS:

- ♦ Our time after Sunday Liturgy provides fellowship that we all look forward to and appreciate. This time is often a mix of simple to more elaborate coffee time and also includes fund raisers and more

formal luncheons. As we begin a new year we would like to reiterate some procedures and policies. We have a calendar meeting in August to establish the schedule and luncheons that will be considered fund raisers during the year. Each Ministry is asked to give input before this schedule is finalized.

- ♦ The Parish Council discussed that each Ministry should determine what they bring to Coffee Hour without strict guidelines. With the end goal that our parishioners should not be pressured or asked to give additional money just to receive a cup of coffee and cookie. Luncheons/Fundraisers fall into a different category and will be published in the monthly calendar.
- ♦ Additionally, when a Ministry needs to setup a table for a special purpose - Information/Sales - **The ministry must call the church office to reserve a table during coffee hour.**
- ♦ Lastly any Ministry that wants to charge for a lunch (not on the original schedule) will need to get approval from the Parish Council by sending written notice prior to the monthly Parish Council Meeting.

LETTERS OF GOOD STANDING

When a parishioner goes to another parish to participate in a sacrament, i.e. to get married somewhere, or to be a sponsor of a wedding or a baptism, they must have a letter of good standing sent on their behalf. The reason for this is two-fold. First, to verify that they are an Orthodox Christian (people come here for sacraments, how do we know if they are Orthodox if we don't know them, so their home priest writes a letter testifying that they are Orthodox), and secondly, to verify that they belong somewhere. A person cannot be considered in good standing merely because they were once baptized Orthodox. A person is in good standing if they are actively participating in the sacramental life of the church – i.e. they worship regularly, they receive Holy Communion regularly, ideally they go to confession regularly, and they offer stewardship somewhere, they participate in sustaining the life of the church and spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. People will often, sadly, approach asking for a letter of good standing when they don't do any of these things. They don't worship, they don't commune, they are not a steward, and yet, somehow, they expect a letter of good standing to be sent on their behalf to another parish, essentially lying for them. So, here's the policy at St. John. For the person who approaches for such a letter, a \$500 fee will be collected. Then, a letter will be written and sent to the priest where they are going stipulating that they gave \$500 to the church, even though they rarely if ever attend, and the other priest can decide what he wants to do. It pains me to write this paragraph, but this practice of asking someone to lie about being in good sacramental sending is actually preposterous and I'm not going to continue to do it. As I have said before, people come with their "you understand, Father, we have baseball, sports, work (insert excuse here) and can never come to church, or even be bothered to fill out a pledge form to support the church so it is here on Pascha when we come once a year." And the truth is actually, I don't understand. And I don't understand how a person in this situation can actually ask me to write a later saying they are in good sacramental standing. Hence, this policy. You understand, right?

+Fr. Stavros

**“GROWING IN CHRIST THIS UPCOMING
LENTEN SEASON.”**

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8
10:00 A.M. - 4:00 P.M.**

ALL MEN ARE WELCOME, ORTHODOX OR NOT

\$15 (COVERS LUNCH)

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

**FR. STAVROS
AKROTIRIANAKIS**



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

2418 W. Swann Ave. Tampa, FL 33609

Kindly RSVP by February 5 to frstav@gmail.com

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

Sunday, January 26 JOY Tweens – Parent/Tweens Retreat
(12:15pm- 2:30pm)

Sunday, February 9 HOPE/ JOY – Superbowl of Caring (Donation drive to benefit Children's Home)

Sunday, February 23 JOY Tweens - Offsite Activity (1:00pm)

Sunday, March 23 JOY Tweens - Meeting with Father Stavros(12:15pm)

Friday, April 18 HOPE/JOY - Good Friday Retreat

Friday, May 2 JOY Tweens – Movie Night (6:00pm)

Sunday, May 18 All Youth - End of Year Party

Thank you to all our JOY Tweens and parents who have attended our events thus far. We've had a lot of fun and are looking forward to more exciting activities in the coming months! JOY Tweens will meet again on January 26, following the Divine Liturgy, for our annual Parent/Tweens Retreat. Stay tuned for more details by email and/or text messages, as well as our weekly church bulletins and Sunday school flyers.

Sign-Up for Text Updates!

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

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

The Sunday School Staff and children would like to wish everyone in our parish many blessing in the New Year and we pray that you all had a wonderful Christmas with your family.

We hope you enjoyed our Christmas Pageant this year. Our students did an amazing job and we are so proud of them. Our actors with speaking parts did a great job memorizing their lines and putting meaning behind their words. All of our 1st - 3rd Graders made excellent shepherds. Our 1st - 3rd Grade girls were adorable angels, and our Pre-K3, Pre-K4, and Kindergarteners were precious animals. We would like to thank all the people involved in this pageant: The teachers, the clergy, the parents, and the amazing cast of The Gifts of Christmas.

CAST:

Visitor: Niko Kyrus Friend: Julie Konstas

Narrators:

1. Andrew Felios
2. Theo Edquid
3. Michael Kwasny
4. Michael Svintsitskiy
5. Koula Niatsikis
6. Casey Callahan
7. Ebby Serbanos

Angel Gabriel: Gabriela Molina/ Angel of the Lord:
Daphne Setzer-Torres/ Mary: Caroline Anton/ Joseph: Vangeli Laliotis
Innkeeper: Dimitri Ameres

Angels:

1. Paige Meadows
2. Anna Galin
3. Katherine Hakim
4. Kyra Christopher
5. Alexandra Laliotis
6. Irene Deshaw

King Herod: Peter Konstas/ Bible Scholar: Louis Mantzanas
Shepherd 1. Sam Lenardos/ Shepherd 2. Nathan Molina/ Shepherd 3. Aristotle Kyrus
King Gaspar: Dimitri Roussos/ King Melchior: Zach Zaharis / King Balthazar: Nicholas Massey

Star Carrier: Niki Naderi
Joseph's Donkey: Madelyn Anton

A special thank you goes out to all the parents and teachers who helped with the Christmas pageant rehearsal and the Hope & Joy/Sunday School Christmas party on December 14th.

Our children prepared so many BOXES OF HOPE. The students learned about the importance of giving to others, not only this season, but throughout the year. Our students also created a number of crafts, had a delicious lunch, and played some games. A good time was had by all.

JANUARY 2025 SUNDAY SCHOOL CALENDAR:

Sun. January 5th: TOPIC: Epiphany - St. John the Baptist 9th - 12th Boys stay in Church

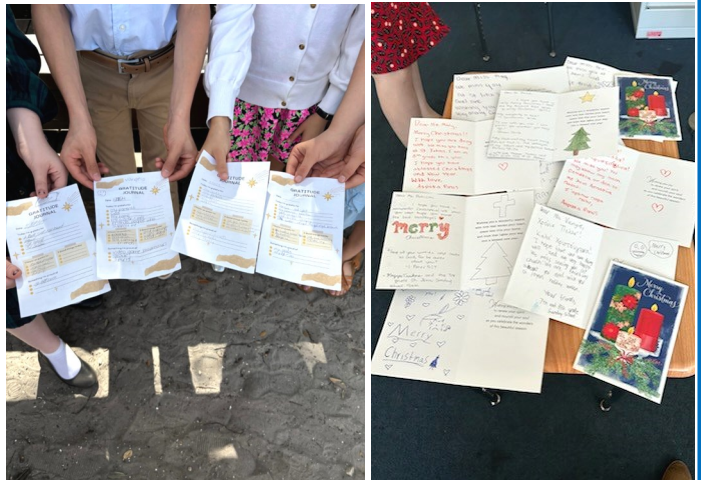
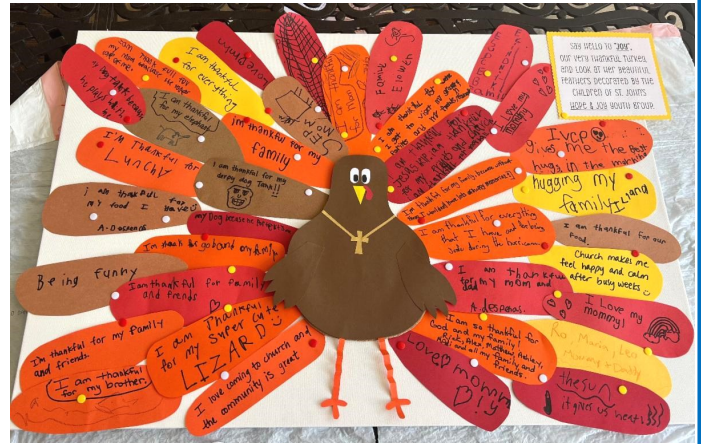
Sat. January 11th: TEACHERS' RETREAT

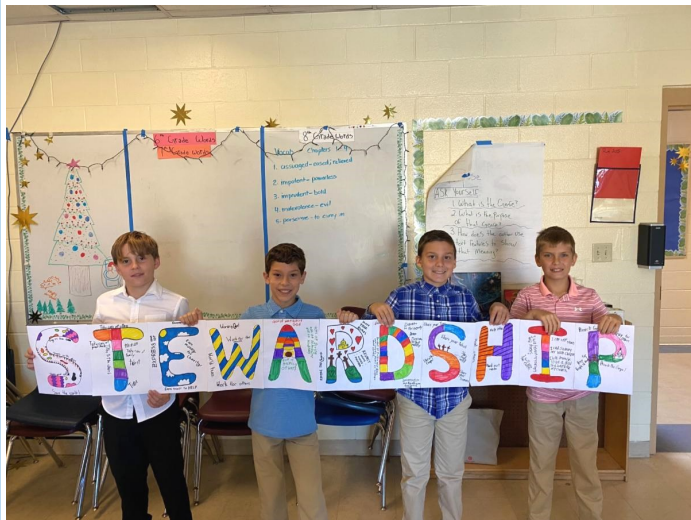
Sun. January 12th: TOPIC: Vasilopita - St. Basil

Sun. January 19th: TOPIC: Salvation (Story of Zacchaeus) YOUTH SUNDAY

Sun. January 26th: TOPIC: Co

SUNDAY SCHOOL PHOTOS





YOUNG AT HEART

MAY GOD
BLESS YOU
and
SEND YOU
a happy
NEW YEAR

YOUNG AT HEART JANUARY GATHERING

Join us on **Saturday, January 11th** for our next Young at Heart Gathering ushering in the New Year!

3pm to 5pm – Appetizers, Desserts, and Beverages

Program – St. Basil the Great

Cutting of the Vasilopita

Please respond to Presvytera Denise no later than January 5th with your number attending. We have been growing by leaps and bounds so please feel free to invite a friend and give them the experience of fellowship, food, and fun.

YOUNG AT HEART NEWS

~Seniors Helping Seniors~

Participants in Young at Heart Silver Elves Christmas Project

Donations to 20 Needy Seniors residing in local Nursing Facilities.



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!



DAUGHTERS OF PENELOPE

DAUGHTERS OF PENELOPE ALCMAEON #167 TAMPA



Happy New Year and Chronia Polla!

The Daughters are wishing you a Blessed Year filled with Love, Joy, Health, Peace, and Prosperity!

The Daughters completed 2024 filled with gratitude. We are grateful for our members that have been with us for years and the many new members that joined us this year. We are grateful for the wonderful times we spent with each other. We are grateful that we were able to donate to End Alzheimer's, to provide supplies to our local schools, to support Founder's Day and support our national organization.

We want to thank all that supported the Yiayia's table again this year. Many members of the Daughters and some which are not, donated items to be sold at the table. Many of the items were handmade. Thank you for your donations!

Thank you to all that purchased the items at the YiaYia's table and for helping us exceed our goal! All proceeds will support the **Scholarship Fund** for our youth. We are grateful for your support!

Pictures of some of the donated items that were for sale at YiaYia's table are shown below.



To support the 2025 activities or to join the Daughters please contact Maria Zabetakis, Vice President and Membership Chair at maria1106@live.com or Ourania Stephanides, President at stephanides.ourania@gmail.com. Please visit the national site for information regarding the Daughters of Penelope organization www.DaughtersofPenelope.org.

BOOKSTORE

What are your resolutions for the New Year???

Do they center on prayer, Scripture reading, and learning more about your Orthodox faith? If so, our bookstore is a great place to begin. From Orthodox study Bibles, Scripture commentaries, books on prayer and spirituality etc., we have what you need to fulfill that resolution. Stop in any Sunday following Divine Liturgy and make this New Year a Christ-centered one!



TOYS FOR TOTS PROGRAM A HUGE SUCCESS!

The members from our Veterans/1st Responders Ministry extend a *SINCERE THANK YOU* to EVERYONE who donated toys and funds to this year's US Marines "**Toys for Tots Program!**" It was a HUGE success! Six large boxes full of toys along with checks in the amount of \$ 5,050 were donated. Thank you for your generosity and kindness. May God bless each of you with a New Year filled with good health, peace, and joy!



Marines picking up "Toys for Tots" after church on Sunday, December 8!



SCHOOL OF GREEK LANGUAGE & CULTURE

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

On Sunday, December 15th the students, teachers and parents of the School of Greek Language and Culture had their Christmas Celebration in a beautiful, warm event which took place in the Library of the Ministry Building. Around 4:30 pm everybody started arriving for the nice party! At the beginning, Father Stavros blessed the event and wished everybody Merry Christmas. The students performed Christmas songs nicely and they recited poems. Santa Claus was there giving presents to all



the children of our school. Afterwards, everybody enjoyed the delicious snacks at the buffet. The director of the school, Mr. Giavaras welcomed everyone and he thanked a lot Mr. Louka Tsoko, the Greek Consul of Tampa for the delicious snacks the Consulate offered, and the President of the Parish Council of Saint John, Mr.

John Zelatis for his kind offer of the presents for the kids for a second year in a row! Also present was Mr. Michalis Halikoutakis, the great sponsor of the school in the first year of its operation, accompanied by his wife Margaret.



Happy Holidays & Happy New Year!



AWARDING OF ELLINOMATHEIA DIPLOMAS

On Saturday, November 16th the School of Greek Language and Culture gave the diplomas for Ellinomatheia to the seven students of it who succeeded in the exams last May.

The following students got the Ellinomatheia Diplomas:

Nikos Kyros (Level A1)
Nikos Tjamaloukas (Level A1)
Aspasia Panos (Level A1)
Nikos Gelis (Level A2)
Rafaela Tjamaloukas (Level B1)
Apostolis Marmagiolis (Level B1)
Konstantinos Tsokos (Level B2)



The director of the school Mr. Giavaras and the General Consul of Greece in Tampa Mr. Tsokos gave the diplomas to the students. Mr. Giavaras spoke about the significance of these diplomas which meet the worldwide standards and they consist of a strong qualification in the students' resume. He congratulated the succeeded students and he said that the School of Greek Language and Culture of Tampa is the only one all over Florida which had candidates who succeeded in B1 & B2 levels of Ellinomatheia. Mr. Tsokos, the Greek Consul, spoke about the importance of the Greek schools in the USA and he said that our school has all the possibilities to grow up farther. At the end, Mr. Giavaras thanked Mr. Tsokos for his continual support to the School of Greek Language and Culture and he wished him and his family good luck to their new life in South Korea, where Mr. Tsokos will be the new ambassador of Greece for the next three years.



HOPE & JOY
BOXES OF HOPE
SUCCESS



THANK YOU

Dear St John's Parishioners,

THANK YOU for all of your generous donations in support of Metropolitan Ministries. We are so pleased to donate #39 boxes of holiday meals plus \$820 in cash/checks/gift cards for those in need this Christmas. May our Lord and Savior grant all a blessed Christmas and New Year!

In Christ, Zackie and Tia

Tampa Bay is blessed with faith-based organizations that collaborate. We are honored to support them through our SJGOC Food Pantry and Community Outreach.

We begin a New Year with full hearts and gratitude for the many helped by our SJGOC Food Pantry and Community Outreach in 2024. The SJGOC Food Pantry and Community Outreach will continue to work together. We also carry trust that our community will provide for the organizations we support and many individuals, through your donations and commitment of time. In addition to our monthly Community Outreach at Tampa Hope where we serve the 3rd Saturday of the Month, we prepared 50 'Snack Bags' on 2 occasions, handed out 'Bags of Groceries' to those in need and supported many individual requests.

We welcome your ideas and support to expand our outreach in 2025

Tampa Hope - Matthew 25 - Metropolitan Ministries



Matthew 25 – Outreach for First Presbyterian. They feed men and women at Tampa Hope 1x per month at 2 locations, Ybor City and Downtown Tampa. Their commitment is unwavering, and we are honored to serve and support their outreach.
<https://firstprestampa.org/ministries/matt-25-ministry-hungryhomeless>

In Matthew 25 Jesus said, “When I was hungry you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. When you do it to one of these brothers and sisters you are doing it to me!”

Tampa Hope - is a shelter for up to 300 men and women, providing shelter, meals, basic hygiene requirements, and services. The goal of Tampa Hope is to move clients into permanent, stable housing with income or increased income opportunities.
<https://www.ccdosp.org/tampa-hope/>

Metropolitan Ministries – started humbly in 1972 by the efforts of 13 churches. They offer comprehensive services for at-risk and homeless families in underserved and impoverished communities and provide the food served at Tampa Hope weekly by Matthew 25 and our volunteers. <https://www.metromin.org>

We welcome donations anytime and have a dedicated drop-off, to the left, inside the church hall entrance. If you know of someone in need or wish to take a bag of groceries to go, we can make that happen! Please call or text Sandra Pappas at 813-785-3747

TWELVE DISCIPLES PROJECT

*I had rather speak five words with my understanding...
than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. (I 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 dates are : 1/18, 2/15, 3/15

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.

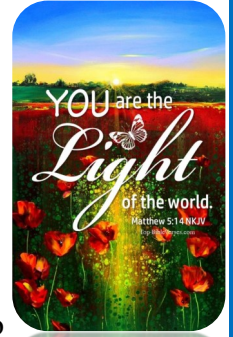


'Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men' Colossians 3:23

STEWARDSHIP

“You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, will through us will produce thanksgiving to God”
2 Corinthians 9:11

We wish everyone a Happy New Year and pray that your time spent rejoicing and celebrating the birth of our savior Jesus Christ brought peace, joy and love to your Christmas holiday. December was Stewardship Month! We are thankful that so many of you have already turned in your forms for 2025. This is a big help to our Parish Council as they manage and plan our resources for the good of all of us. In 2025, our goal is to continue the long-term growth trend in Stewardship giving. If you have not completed your pledge form to St. John's, please take the time to do so today. You may complete the form online or pick up a hard copy at the church office or narthex.



Thank You to our many loyal stewards of 2024! Your gifts support our church Vision and Mission. You enable us to spread the word of Jesus Christ' as well as supporting our many ministries and activities throughout the entire year. Here is a quick summary of where we are as of 12/15/2024:

Number of Families Giving	357
Total Stewardship Collected	\$616,957

There are many new faces in the pews every Sunday. It's great to see so much interest and enthusiasm for our Orthodox Faith. I know Father Stavros' liturgies and messages are benefitting more and more people every year. If you are new to our church community and are interested in learning more about your role in our Stewardship Program, please call or text George Mitseas at (813)748-1220. I'd welcome an opportunity to explain to you, how your participation in Stewardship can benefit you, your family and the entire St. John's Greek Orthodox community.

Have a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year!

AXIOS TO HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN SEVASTIANOS, THE NEW METROPOLITAN OF ATLANTA!

His Grace Bishop Sevastianos of Zela was elected as the new Metropolitan of Atlanta this past week, replacing Metropolitan Alexios who recently retired. His Eminence has visited our parish many times over the six years he has served as the assistant Bishop in our Metropolis. Going forward, we will be commemorating His Eminence “For our Archbishop Sevastianos” in our divine services. His Eminence will be formally enthroned as the Metropolitan of Atlanta on Saturday, January 25 in Atlanta, and Fr. Stavros will participate representing our parish. We wish His Eminence many years as he begins this new ministry. Eis Polla Eti, Despota!

(Fr. Stavros will represent our Parish at the enthronement of His Eminence Metropolitan Sevastianos of Atlanta, on January 25 in Atlanta.)



NURSING MINISTRY

DO YOU HAVE CATARACTS???



What is a cataract?

A cataract is the clouding of the normally clear lens of the eye that gives it a frosty or foggy look. Most cataracts develop slowly over the course of years. The main symptom is blurry vision. Having cataracts can be like looking through a cloudy window. According to the National Eye Institute more than half of all Americans either have a cataract or have had cataract surgery by the time they are 80 years old. The American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends that adults with no signs or risk factors for eye disease get a baseline eye disease screening at age 40, which is when early signs of the disease start to occur.

Can you see cataracts in your own eyes?

You will not be able to see or even feel your cataract, but there are some common symptoms, which include the following: A painless blurring of vision. Glare or light sensitivity. Frequent eyeglass prescription changes.

Signs and symptoms of cataracts:

- Your vision is cloudy or blurry
- Colors look faded
- You can't see well at night
- Lamps, sunlight, or headlights seem too bright
- You see a halo around light
- You see double (this sometimes goes away as the cataract gets bigger)
- You have to change the prescription for your glasses often

Treatment for cataracts:

Surgery is the only way to treat cataracts. When a cataract interferes with someone's usual activities, the cloudy lens can be replaced with a clear, artificial lens. This is generally a safe, outpatient procedure.

Decrease the Risk of Cataracts?

1. Have regular eye exams.
2. Stop smoking, reduce alcohol use and manage health problems.
3. Eat fruits and vegetables.
4. Always wear sunglasses.

Risk factors:

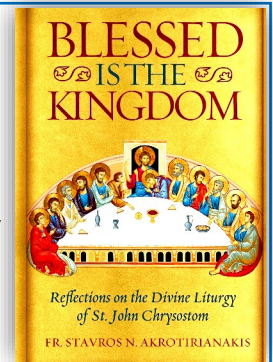
Your risk for cataracts goes up as you get older. You're also at higher risk if you:

- Have certain health problems, like diabetes
- Smoke
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Have a family history of cataracts
- Have had an eye injury, eye surgery, or radiation treatment on your upper body
- Have spent a lot of time in the sun
- Take steroids (medicines used to treat a variety of health problems, like arthritis and rashes)

Please reach out to one of your nursing ministry nurses if you need more information.

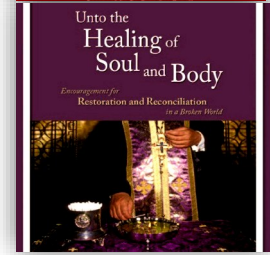
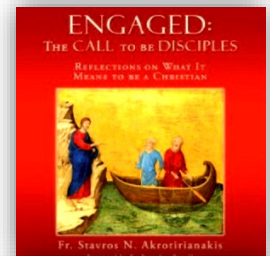
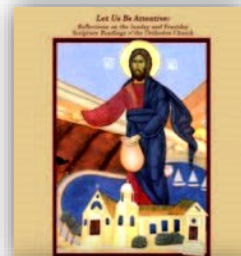
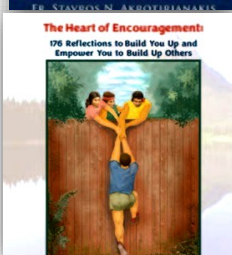
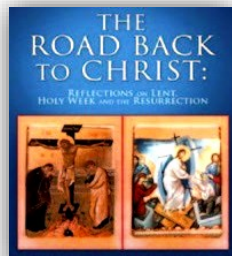
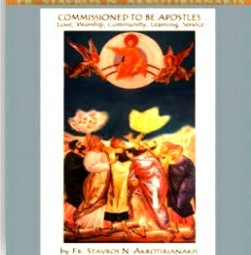
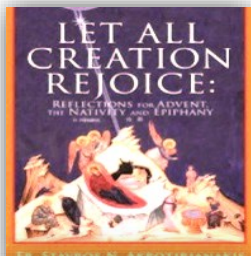
FR. STAVROS NEW BOOK

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

PHOTO GALLERY



**Christine Scourtes 100th Birthday Celebration—
October 13**



**Sunday
School
Christmas
Retreat and
Rehearsal
2024—
Saturday,
December
14**

**Sunday School
Christmas Program
2024—
Sunday, December
15**



On Sunday, **December 8**, we recognized Michael and Bessie Palios, this year's Archangel Michael winners from our Parish. The Archangel Michael Award is bestowed by the Metropolis on two individuals from each parish in recognition of their service. Congratulations Michael and Bessie for being this year's winners and thank you for all of your dedicated service to our parish.



More pictures from
**Sunday School
 Christmas Program
 2024–
 Sunday, December 15**



*Christmas Sunrise Liturgy, on Friday
 December 20.*

INTERESTED IN LEARNING ABOUT
ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY?
PLEASE JOIN US FOR A FOUR WEEK COURSE

Orthodoxy 101

BEGINS IN SEPTEMBER & OFFERED BY
FR. STAVROS N. AKROTIRIANAKIS, PARISH PRIEST

WHY SHOULD I ATTEND ORTHODOXY 101?

· INTERFAITH COUPLES. THIS WILL HELP THE NON-ORTHODOX PERSON UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON IN OUR CHURCH.

· ANYONE WHO IS CONSIDERING JOINING OUR CHURCH. GOING FORWARD, THIS CLASS WILL BE A REQUIREMENT FOR THOSE WHO WISH TO JOIN OUR ORTHODOX FAITH.

· NEW CONVERTS TO ORTHODOXY. FOR THOSE WHO RECENTLY JOINED OUR CHURCH AND WHO WANT TO KNOW A LITTLE BIT MORE.

· ANYONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE BASICS OF OUR FAITH, OR WHO WANTS A REFRESHER

WHEN WILL THE CLASSES BE HELD?

* MONDAY, JANUARY 20
A TOUR OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH: WHAT WE SEE AND WHAT IT MEANS

* MONDAY, JANUARY 27
INTRODUCTION TO THE SACRAMENTS- BAPTISM, CHRISTMATION, CONFESSION, MARRIAGE, UNCTION

* MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3
THE DIVINE LITURGY – A “TEACHING” LITURGY

* MONDAY, FEBRUARY 10
ORTHODOX TRADITIONS – FASTING, ICONS, PRAYER AND LIVING AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN LIFE

WHAT FORMAT CAN I EXPECT?

A RELAXED ATMOSPHERE WITH PRESENTATIONS, INTERACTIVE DISCUSSIONS, AND LOTS OF TIME FOR QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

CLASSES WILL BE HELD FROM 6:30-8:30 P.M. IN THE CHURCH SANCTUARY.

Please sign up with Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com, so he has enough materials for everyone.

There is no charge for this class.

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH · 2418 W. SWANN AVENUE · TAMPA, FL · 33609

PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS!

January Calendar!



1/6 - **Epiphany**—Philoptochos will be hosting the reception after Vespers.

1/19 – **Vasilopita Sunday**—We are having our annual Vasilopita Sunday. We will be raising funds for Saint Basil's Orphanage and other youth needs. Contact Jeannie Nenos (chair) for details (813) 451-9116 or jeanierett@aol.com.



1/26 – **General Membership meeting**— 12:15 PM in the Zaharias room. All women of the community are invited.

Look Ahead—Heads up Shoppers! In February we will be collecting school supplies for the Hillsborough County Education Foundation/Teaching Tools Resource Center.



Thank You!

The Philoptochos thanks everyone who donated gift cards!
We raised over \$400

PHILOPTOCHOS 2025 MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

We are on the MOVE for a Great New Year!

We invite all women ages 18 plus to join the St. John the Baptist Philoptochos Annunciation Chapter!

Membership Drive: January thru April, Suggested Stewardship is \$35.00, however, we accept whatever you can give to support our mission.

Your donation makes you a member of the National, Metropolis and Local Chapters of Philoptochos. **We invite all women age 80 and above to join us as honorary members with no dues required.**

“Truly I tell you, whatever you do for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you do for me.” (Matt 24:25)

Name _____	Date _____	
Street Address _____		
City _____	State _____	Zip _____
Home Phone _____	Cell _____	
E-mail address _____		

Main areas of interest (check all that apply): Visiting the Sick _____, Fundraising _____, Spiritual Retreats _____,

Communication (Messenger-Sunday Bulletin) _____, Baking _____, Social Gatherings _____, Decorating _____

Koliva _____ Other (write in) _____

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America – Ladies Philoptochos Society. The mission of the Society shall be:

To aid the poor, the destitute, the hungry, the aged, the sick, the unemployed, the orphaned, the imprisoned, the widowed, the handicapped, the victims of disasters, to undertake the burial of impoverished persons and to offer assistance to anyone who may need the help of the Church through fund raising efforts; and

To promote the charitable, benevolent, and philanthropic purposes of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, through instructional programs, presentations, lectures, seminars and other educational resources;

To preserve and perpetuate Orthodox Christian concepts and the Orthodox Christian Family, and through them, to promote the Greek Orthodox Faith and traditions, in accordance with its doctrines, canons, discipline, divine worship, usages and customs;

To promote participation in the activities of the Greek Orthodox community, with the cooperation of the Parish Priest and the Parish Council.

Please return form to: **Presvytera Denise Stefero, 11209 Lark Landing Ct., Riverview, FL 33569** or

Drop off on any Sunday in St. John’s Bookstore. Questions: **denises54@hotmail.com**

Please make checks payable to: St. John Philoptochos or pay online <https://square.link/u/l23vm6lr>

SCHOLARSHIP AND INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES!



SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION

2024-2025



\$250,000 IN SCHOLARSHIPS

Applications are due
January 31, 2025

The application, criteria,
requirements, and guidelines
are available at
www.panhellenicsf.org



NEED AN INTERN?

RECRUIT INTERNS THROUGH THE PANHELLENIC SCHOLARSHIP FOUNDATION!



Discover New Talent: Tap into a pool of skilled young professionals ready to bring their perspectives to your company.



Make a Lasting Impact: Help shape the next generation of professionals in the Hellenic community by providing mentorship and real-world experience.



PANHELLENIC
SCHOLARSHIP
FOUNDATION

PanHellenic Scholarship Foundation
8501 West Higgins Road • Suite 210
Chicago, Illinois 60631

☎ 312.357.6432
📠 312.872.0090
🌐 panhellenicsf.org
✉ info@panhellenicsf.org

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.

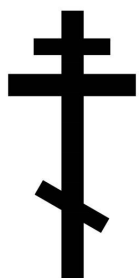


INTERESTED IN JOINING THE PRAYER TEAM?

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 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 has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.

**The Prayer Team has a new dedicated website: PrayerTeam365.com
Check it out! Search by topic and grow in your faith today!**

MEMORIAL & KOLYVA PROTOCOL



1. Memorial Services **MUST** be scheduled through the church office at least two weeks in advance of when you want the service.
2. Memorial services for 40 days and one year will be done on the Sunday closest to the appropriate date. All other memorials will be done on the designated Memorial Sunday each month.
3. Please let the office know when you call or email whether you will be providing your own kolyva or whether you wish for the Philoptochos to provide. If a family chooses to make their own Kolyva(es), the family will be responsible for scooping the Kolyva(es) in the kitchen after the Memorial Service to share with the entire community.
4. If the Philoptochos does the kolyva, there is a \$100 charge for this service-checks may be made payable to "St. John Philoptochos."
5. Also, please send the church office all of the names you wish to have commemorated at the memorial service, and how many pews, if any, you would like reserved for your family.

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.

Follow Us on Social Media



St. John the Baptist



Let's Get Connected for Our Latest News & Updates



on Flickr

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



on Facebook

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



on Instagram @stjohntpa



stjohntpa.org

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 unawares.*
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 smpileggi@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

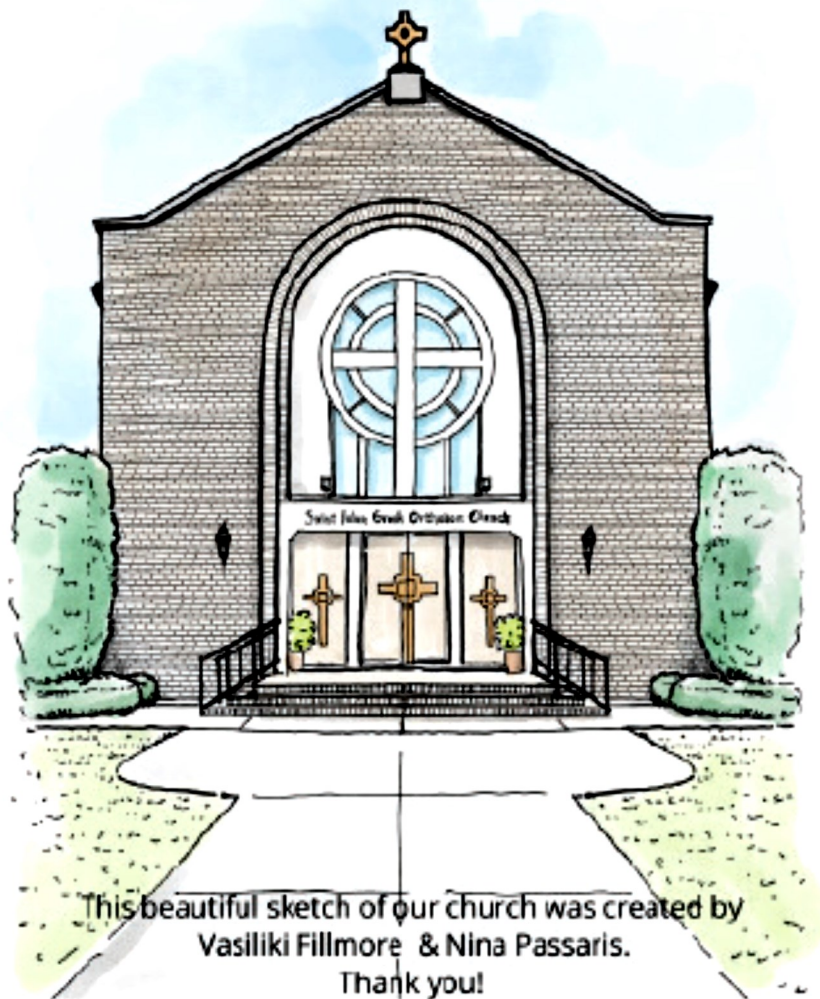
Please mail this form and check to: St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
2418 W. Swann Ave Tampa, FL 33609.

January 2025

▶ December 2025						February 2025▶
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 New Year's Day St. Basil Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	2	3	4 Adult Greek School Children's Greek School
5 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Blessing of the Waters 11:15a.m.	6 Vespers-St. John the Baptist 6:30 p.m. Philoptochos Reception	7 St. John the Baptist Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	8 ** Choir 7:15 p.m.	9 Young Adult Discussion 7:00p.m.	10 **	11 Sunday school teachers seminar 9:00am-12:00pm Adult Greek School Children's Greek School
12 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. GOYA 5:00p.m.	13 Meeting of Ministry Heads 6:30 p.m.	14 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	15 ** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m. Choir 7:15 p.m.	16	17 ** St. Anthony Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	18 Community Outreach
19 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Youth Sunday Vasilopita Sunday Men's Group 5:00p.m.	20 Martin Luther King Jr. Young at Heart 11:30-2:00 p.m. Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m.	21 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	22** Choir 7:15 p.m.	23	24 ** GOYA Clearwater Winter Event	25 Gasparilla Parking GOYA Clearwater Winter Event Enthronement of Metropolitan Sevastianos in Atlanta
26 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Philoptochos Meeting Parent/Tweens Retreat 12:30-2:30 p.m.	27 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m.	28 St. James the Ascetic Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	29 ** Choir 7:15 p.m.	30 Three Hierarchs Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	31 **	**Fast Day

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