



ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

— THE MESSENGER —

Christ Has Risen! **MAY 2025** *Christos Anesti!*



HOLY ASCENSION OF OUR LORD - THURSDAY, MAY 29

Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis (Proistamenos)
Fr. John Stefero (Associate Priest)
Fr. Stratton Dorozenski (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 10:00a.m.

Parish Priest

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Associate Priest

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Retired Priest in Residence

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Ministry Coordinator/Chanter

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Parish Council

Alexis Scarfogliero, President 813-892-1599
George Ameres, Vice President 941-720-3494
Marilyn Sandborn, Secretary 813-760-6289
George Chagaris, Treasurer 727-420-1920
Peggy George 813-727-5587
Peter George 781-910-9971
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Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855
Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026
John Carter 813-376-9196
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Arise & Build Expansion Project

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Euripides Panos, Vice Chair 813-352-3972

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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

Presbytera Denise Stefero 678-464-4833

Bible Study-Tuesday Night

Fr. John Stefero 678-637-4425

Buildings & Grounds

Tony Magos 813-957-3206

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 MAΣ, 813-340-9668
Alexandra De Maio
Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963
ΠΑΡΕΑ,
Marina Choundas 813-877-6136
ΠΑΝΗΓΥΡΙ,
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

Fady Hakim 678-294-7732

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

Philoptochos

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

Theo Panopoulos 248-867-3697

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRIEST

~THANK YOU for a Renewing
Holy Week Journey~



Christos Anesti! Christ is Risen!

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

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

A big thank you to **Marcelle Triantafilou** and her small crew who cooked and served a fantastic Paschal meal.

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

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

~To our Ministry Coordinator **Maria Xenick** from chanting at our services and doing many things in the background to involve many people at the chanter stand as well as logistical support for just about everything that happened during Holy Week.

~To **Mike Xenick**, **Ewana Forde** and **Markella Balasis** who helped out with the chanting; and to the many others who helped out with the readings.

~To **Karter Lenardos**, for his help in the altar. And to our faithful **altar boys** for setting a tone of reverence at all of the services, and for **your valuable presence** standing guard at the Cross and Tomb of Christ.

~To **Dr. Andrea Tsatalis** and our young adult group for organizing the vigil at the Cross and to all those

who came and read throughout the night and on Good Friday.

~The **choir**, led by **Tara Swartzbaugh**, who sang six of the seven nights of Holy Week. The Hymn of Kassiane and the Lamentations were both memorable this year.

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

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

~**Chris Mantzanas** and the ushers who made sure everything ran smoothly.

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

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

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

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

~The light-bearers—**Emily Nicklow**, **Ariana Thatcher**, and **Calliope Kafantaris**—who received and distributed the Light of Christ at the Resurrection Service.

~**Tia L-Hommedieu**, for organizing our Holy Wednesday afternoon readers.

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

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

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

~The **Philoptochos Society** which put on the Palm Sunday luncheon.

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

GRADUATING TO SOMETHING BETTER

In the month of May, our son Nicholas, and ten other high school seniors of our parish will finish high school. Several of our young people will also graduate from college and graduate school. We will celebrate their accomplishments, as we do each year and recognize each in our June/July issue of *The Messenger*. No one graduates from a program of study with the desire to do *nothing* with it. In fact, our lives are a constant journey of study/work, followed by accomplishment, followed by renewed energy, study/work, accomplishment, renewed energy, etc. The student who graduates high school has done four years of study. This is followed by the accomplishment of graduation. Followed by renewed energy that is taken to college, followed by study,

then graduation, then renewed energy taken to a job, followed by work, promotion, new energy, renewed vigor at work, etc. At least this is how the cycle is supposed to work.

Very few people, I would think, would go through a program of study and complete high school or college and then say, "that's enough, no more work for me, I think I'll take my accomplishments and put them in the drawer and dedicate my life to playing video games." I'm sure there are a few people who sadly fall into this category, but the majority, thankfully, do not. They use their accomplishment to springboard to something else.

Yes, at the moment of graduation, there are probably feelings that are bittersweet—one chapter is ending and another is beginning. There will probably be some nostalgia for the chapter that has ended, maybe even a little sadness that it is over. However, there will be joy for the new chapter that is about to begin. There may be some nervousness intertwined with anticipation, that is normal, but then the new phase begins, and there ends up being comfort in the new phase. It's the same thing when we graduate college and go into the workforce. There is some nostalgia as we look back at college, maybe even a little sadness for the phase that is over (the long breaks at Christmas and in summer among them), but this is replaced by the joy of putting into practice what one has learned, and of course getting paid to do it.

As a parent of an about to graduate high school senior, I feel bittersweet. Our little boy is now a young man, our nest is about to be empty. But that is what is supposed to happen. They are supposed to grow up and go. If they don't, it might mean that something went amiss along the way.

This cycle can break down in a few ways. The student might not graduate because he did not apply himself. That happens. A college student might drop out of college and decide that is not for him/her. That's actually okay, college isn't for everyone. There are plenty of people who find jobs where they make a contribution to the world and bring home a good paycheck that don't involve a college degree. Remember our list of the most important jobs in the world—the sanitation worker, truck driver and farmer—these jobs don't necessarily require a degree, and where would we be without them? Dead. Honest work is honest work and we need all kinds of workers to make everything go right.

The cycle also is breaking down in the work force as people's work ethic declines. People work only for the paycheck, in many instances. Of course, a paycheck is an important by-product of work. I certainly couldn't afford to work and not take one. However, there is nobility in work, in bringing something to the greater world, and this is getting lost it seems.

The correct cycle is work/study-accomplishment-renewed energy-work/study-accomplishment-renewed energy, etc. And many of us have gotten that cycle correct in our lives.

THE WORK/STUDY-ACCOMPLISHMENT-RENEWED ENERGY CYCLE AS IT RELATES TO FAITH

The work/study-accomplishment-renewed energy-work/study-accomplishment-renewed energy cycle also works as it relates to our Orthodox Christian faith. We just finished an intense cycle of Great Lent and Holy Week. Pascha was graduation day. Many people showed up that day. Some were filled with joy, as they mark the completion of a season of spiritual intensity. They fasted, they came to the many services, they made changes in their spiritual lives. Pascha is the culmination of that journey, a worthy opportunity to rejoice.

Some probably didn't feel very full. They didn't fast, they didn't make much effort, and Pascha then becomes just an event, it is not part of any cycle. I saw a social media post from someone who posted how much they love Easter, that it is their annual reset on Jesus. Except that this person only comes on Easter, so it is an annual reset of exactly what, I'm not sure. It resets the clock on how many days it's been since I last went to church, the 365 days goes back to zero—I guess in that sense it is a reset.

Whether we arrived at Pascha feeling full of joy, or just came to check a box, all of us arrived at Pascha with the opportunity for renewed energy, which can then be part of the cycle. Renewed energy brings us to work/study, which leads to accomplishment and the cycle continues. So whether one arrived at Pascha with a sense of accomplishment or not, we all have the opportunity for the renewed energy. It's like the Homily of St. John Chrysostom says, both the ones that toiled from the first hour and those who only arrived at the eleventh are allowed to take away a sense of joy from the experience.

You'll receive this issue of *The Messenger* during the Paschal season. Hopefully you'll receive it before May 4. If you are reading this message and the "high" of Pascha has already worn off, or if you never got a "high" from the experience, do not despair. Come to church next Sunday (and especially on **May 4**, as we read the Gospel of the Resurrection again), sing the beautiful hymn "**Christos Anesti**" and find some renewed energy. One of the goals of the Paschal season is to bring us to a sense of accomplishment and renewed energy so that is reinvigorated strength in our work/study of the faith.

ARISE & BUILD CONTINUES WITH RENEWED ENERGY

We see the church filled past capacity each Sunday, as well as on Good Friday. What a beautiful thought that God-willing this time next year, we will begin the expansion of the sanctuary and during that time we

will be worshipping in the Kourmolis Center, all together. And in two years, God-willing, we will be back in the newly-renovated church, all together. We are now less than two months away from having our entire property for our full-time use every day. It is an exciting time for sure.



St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
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As of this writing, we have received nearly **\$5.4M** in **Arise & Build commitments**. The goal is **\$7.8M**. There are two things that are needed to achieve this goal:

1. Participation by everyone—We need everyone's participation in order to make this go. Why? Because there is still a way to go to achieve our goal. And more important, once we make our goal and expand and update our church facility, we want everyone to share in the joy of the accomplishment. The renovations will benefit everyone. Everyone needs to join in the work/study. It goes back to the chain I described above.
2. Participation needs to be sacrificial—When I got involved in this project, particularly the fundraising aspect, I refused to put a target number on anyone. I don't know everyone's financial circumstances, nor do I want to. I do know most of the people associated with this community. I've been to your homes, I follow your activities on social media. I know that we have the means within our community to not only meet our goal, but to exceed our goal. When we do something and there is no sacrificial element to it, there also isn't much joy in the accomplishment, no renewed energy, we don't get into that cycle of success. Just like the person who only goes to one Holy Week service doesn't feel the sense of renewal that the person who went to all of them feels. When we put in the work, and no real work happens without sacrifice, then there is the sense of accomplishment as well as the satisfaction that comes with it. If someone gives a token donation to this campaign, they are not only inhibiting the success of this project. They are inhibiting their involvement in the cycle of accomplishment, renewed energy, etc. The word "token" means something different for each person. A \$1K gift for someone might be a stretch, but for someone who is a multi-millionaire, it is a "token." We need to approach our gift not as an amount, but as a representation of ourselves. If the gift represents a real sacrifice, a real stretch, then there will be a

sense of accomplishment when this project is over. If the gift is just a token, we will deprive ourselves of this project as a step in the cycle that propels us to renewed energy, which leads to deeper faith.

Arise & Build is a way for us to fulfill the Great Commission—Jesus charged His disciples to take the Gospel to all nations in **Matthew 28:18-19**. This commission is read over each of us at our baptisms, as we become disciples and inherit the same charge. When we stand before the Lord at our final exam, His awesome judgment seat, we will not only answer for what we believed, but what we did with what we believe. Expanding our church and creating a ministry center are two concrete ways for our parish to advance our Christian faith and spread it to more people. Our participation in this project will help each of us do the same.

The Arise & Build Capital Campaign is an opportunity to not only advance our parish in its mission, but an opportunity to advance each of us in our faith.

TAKING OUR PLACE IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE CYCLE

Ecclesiastes 3:1 reads *To everything there is a season, a time for every matter under heaven.* Life is a cycle through seasons. There is the season of study, then work, then retirement, and eventually life ends, and we enter either a season of eternal life or eternal condemnation. Our eternal standing is determined in large part to how we go through the cycle of life's seasons. If there is a cycle of faith that leads our life, the end of life, the final graduation, becomes a source of joyful anticipation of the eternal life that is to come. If we haven't done the studying and preparation, then graduation from life becomes a source of trepidation that we avoid at all costs, because we know deep down that we are not prepared. Thankfully the Church offers us opportunities like Holy Week to get us back into the cycle that leads to eternal life. Involvement in our church community also helps us stay in the cycle, because it encourages work, which leads to accomplishment, which leads to renewed energy, etc. And **Arise & Build** is also a unique opportunity to solidify our place in that cycle.



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Pascha is not meant to be celebrated as an ending of a journey but the beginning of a greater journey, something meant to propel us forward in the cycle. It's the same thing with graduation from high school or college. May the Lord guide us, and may we let the Lord guide us, through the seasons of this life, to the accomplishment of eternal life, where the cycle stops and it is just sheer joy, forever.

With love in the Risen Lord,
+Fr. Stavros

HOLY WEEK SERMONS AND PICTURES

Several people have asked for copies of the sermons I offered during Holy Week. Following are the ones that were written in text. Also, on the following pages of the Messenger, please enjoy photographs from our recently completed Holy Week journey.

SERMON-PALM SUNDAY

A MEDITATION ON PHILIPPIANS 4:8



Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. **Philippians 4:8** (NKJV) As I reflected on what to preach on today, my thoughts were drawn more to St. Paul's letter to the

Philippians than the Gospel of John. We know the story of the Gospel—Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, the day after He raised Lazarus from the dead, and five days before He would exit Jerusalem, carrying His cross to Golgotha. The thoughts contained in the Epistle are hard to understand, not because it is hard to define words like “true, noble, just, pure, lovely and good,” but because the world we live in is constantly trying to mangle and redefine these words, and the result is anger, confusion and sadness.

Truth. Jesus said “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.*” (**John 14:6**) He was not just “a way,” or “a truth.” He is **THE way and THE truth**. Pontius Pilate looked at Jesus and asked Him “*What is truth?*” (**John 18:38**) He was looking truth in the eye and he couldn't see it. Try this experiment. Ask a group of people a question that is an obvious truth, like what color is my green robe, and each person will say “green.” Ask if they are sure, if they would put \$100 on it, and they will say yes it is green. Ask them “what if I told you my green robe is really red?” Most, if not all, will say “it is still green.” Then ask “what if I said you seem like a nice guy, or girl, and maybe we could be friends, but if you don't think the robe is red you are hurting my feelings.” Depending on the age, many will quickly change their answer and say the robe is red, lest your feelings get hurt. This is the world we live in. We've lost our sense of truth.

A few weeks ago, I had a retreat with a group of young adults. I asked them what is the biggest thing you are wrestling with, I had them write their answers on notecards, then collected the notecards, and redistributed them to the group, so now everyone had a notecard but they didn't know whose they had. They went around and each offered the answer on the card they were holding. Not surprisingly, at least not to me, half of them said they were struggling with lust. However, what surprised me was that 25% of them said the biggest thing they were struggling with is despair. I guess when I think about it, there are lots of

people who struggle with this. Many times I am struggling with this.

There is an obvious truth that many of us tend to forget. We are created in the image and likeness of God, which means we are of infinite value. There is a difference between grief and despair. Grief results from sadness over someone or something of value that has been lost. Despair comes from sadness over loss of self, when we have sadness because we think WE have no value.

Even a strong Christian like St. Paul had his moments of despair. In **2 Corinthians 1:8**, he writes, *For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself.* I'm positive there is someone in church this morning who is feeling just like St. Paul felt. At some point in life, we are all going to feel like this. There are people in this church right now, probably many of you, most of whom will not admit it to themselves let alone anyone else, who are suffering from low self-esteem. We've wrapped our identity in something or someone who has disappointed us. We've forgotten that we have value. Perhaps we've also forgotten how to forgive, be merciful, we've forgotten how to be positive, how to see the glass half full. We've forgotten that God is positive, that love is patient, kind and optimistic, whether that is God's love for us, our love for Him, our love for one another, and even our love for ourselves. We've forgotten that, and for many of us, it has left us in despair.

Holy Week comes at the perfect time for many of us. Because this journey not only provides us an opportunity to relearn and remember the Passion, death and Resurrection of Christ. It gives us an opportunity to rediscover ourselves, our value, our purpose, and to have a “resurrection” of our own, a resurrection, a revival of our souls and spirits, and for our overall outlook on life. If St. Paul was struggling with his own sense of value, to the point that he despaired of life itself, there is no shame if we are struggling with the same thing. We are in good company.

In the Old Testament book of Nehemiah, the people were struggling with their sense of value. Having been exiled for hundreds of years to Babylon, where they lived as slaves, they lost their homeland, their freedom and their hope. Even worse though, because their understanding of God was that He resided in the temple, they thought with the loss of their city and temple, that they had lost their God as well. The prophet Nehemiah rallied the people with the cry “*let us arise and build.*” (**Nehemiah 2:18**) And the people responded. They strengthened their hands for the good work, the noble endeavor of restoring their city, so that it could be their home and their sanctuary again.

We have two opportunities to **arise and build** at St. John. We are not a city in ruins, but we are a society

on the verge of collapse, because when enough people are in despair full time, there becomes a loss of hope, and without hope, we quickly find ourselves in the shoes of St. Paul, where we feel so incredibly crushed that we begin to despair of life itself. Holy Week is upon us, and with it, an opportunity to rediscover meaning—to life, to the Christian journey—or perhaps find a deeper meaning, and maybe for some of us, to experience for the first time and try to find some meaning. There will be ample opportunities through our multiple services each day, to meditate on the things that are true, the things that are noble, the things that are just, the things that are pure, the things that are lovely, the things that are virtuous, and the things that are praiseworthy. And to remember that we can be all things through Christ, that there is always a road back, even if we've fallen away.

Tonight and tomorrow night, we will gaze at the icon of the Nymphios, and see in the expression of Christ, a message that says *"I value each one of you. I want each one of you. No matter who you are, or what you've done, I still want you."* On Tuesday, when we sing hymns about the betrayal of Judas, we will understand the betrayal happening not because Judas didn't see the value in Jesus. It will be because he couldn't see value in himself. Because he was looking at truth, just like Pontius Pilate, and either couldn't handle the truth, or chose to believe a lie, both about Jesus and about himself. That Jesus did not have value. And that Judas didn't have value. And both of those statements couldn't be further away from the truth.

On Holy Wednesday evening

we will come to receive Holy Unction, to be anointed for the healing of soul and body. We will hear prayers that recount sinful deeds of sinful people who later became saints, like the denial of Peter, and the persecution of the early church by St. Paul. And we will hear that they never lost value in the eyes of God. He still wanted even them. And He still wants each of us.



On Holy Thursday evening, we will again witness the procession of the crucified Christ, and see in His overarching embrace, a message that says *"I still want you."* If Christ had the capacity to forgive those who were killing Him, and to grant salvation to a repentant thief who did exactly one good thing with his life, He most certainly has the capacity and the compassion to receive our repentance. The challenge is that we must offer it. We must see the value in Christ and our own value in order to make that connection work. On Good Friday, we will stand at the tomb of Christ, and wonder, how did the whole world get it wrong—how far did we fall collectively, that the people of Jerusalem that day looked truth in the eye and screamed "Crucify Him, Crucify Him!"—and no one stepped up to stop it. The world is twisting truth, and it is



looking down on us because we want truth, we want the way, the truth and the life, we want Jesus Christ (at least I hope we do) and He wants us. Finally, on Pascha, we will reaffirm and celebrate the greatest truth—that Christ is risen from the dead, by death, trampling down death, and to those in the tombs, He bestows life.

And in two weeks, we will make the most critical decision of the year for each of us. Will we put that truth back on the shelf for another year, or will we live by truth. Will we be here to worship and follow the way, the truth and the life, that is Jesus Christ. A lot of the world is ridiculing Christians this year. These criticisms cause doubt and distraction. The overall busy-ness of the world zaps our time and our brain space so that we are not taking the time to pray, or to read Scripture. We are not taking the time to worship. We are afraid to sacrificially give. All this because the world is mangling truth, and taking away our paths to truth by overbooking us, and requiring us to keep up with the Joneses. The phones which connect us farther and faster than any time in the history of humanity have also left us lonely, isolated, and despairing. I don't know about you, but I often feel like the Prophet Nehemiah, who is trying to rally the troops to arise and build their city, and who probably felt like he was running into a wall instead of building one. I don't know about you but I'm looking forward to putting the phone down this week, and focusing back on what is good and noble and right.

The second opportunity to **arise and build** at St. John is a project we are doing by the same name, **Arise & Build**. We have a goal to expand our sanctuary. Why? Because over the past several years, there are so many people who desire to discover truth, nobility, justice, purity, and to do it as Orthodox Christians, that we need more seats for them. We need a campus that is fully available full time for worship, community, learning and service, the core values of our parish. We need a ministry building to house the many ministries that help us get out this message that you have value if you have Christ, that Christ values all of us, and we need space for ministries to get out that message to a world that desperately needs it. We need updates to our overall physical plant, like an electronic billboard in the front of the church, in order to show the world the truth of Christ and to let them know how many paths we offer to Him. We need more parking spaces to accommodate the growing number of people who want to worship here. We need a prayer garden, an oasis on our campus where people can sit and pray, read, and reflect. We need updates to our grounds to insure safety, efficiency, accessibility and beauty.

And in order to do these things, we need **\$7.8M**. Through God's grace the generosity of many of you, we've raised just **over \$5M, or 65% of our goal**. If you haven't made your commitment yet, we have designated this Sunday as our **Arise & Build Commitment Sunday**. If you are ready to make your commitment, please do so after church, either at the **Arise & Build** table, or if you so desire, right here, in front of the icon of Christ, with a prayer that the sustenance you offer will never leave you without

sustenance for yourself. The **Arise & Build** Team is going to facilitate each person or family who wishes, to have a few minutes alone with me in the church, so we can pray over your commitment. The story is told in the Gospels of a woman who went to contribute to the temple treasury, and she put in two copper coins. All of the Pharisees ridiculed her gift. Yet, Jesus said her gift was the greatest of all, since two coins was all she had, she put in everything. Whatever gift you offer should be one of nobility, it should reflect your faith in the truth, Who is Jesus Christ. And it should reflect your desire to share this truth with others. In order for this project to succeed, it will need the involvement of each of us, and it will need participation that is sacrificial and also joyful.

I have not been here on a Sunday in three weeks, which feels like three months to be honest. I have missed being here. I had the unique opportunity to lead two retreats, one on each coast, about what it means to be a disciple and what it means to be an apostle. Simply put, the disciple is the student, the one who learns what it means to follow Christ. An Apostle is one who helps others become disciples of Christ, an Apostle is one who shares the faith. And this can be done in many ways—in teaching, in encouraging, and in providing the means for others to teach and encourage. This is what our **Arise & Build** Capital Campaign is all about. Each of us has the opportunity to offer a gift reflective of our identity as disciples and apostles, by providing the means for people to be taught and encouraged in the Orthodox Christian faith. One cannot be an Apostle without first being a disciple. One cannot go out and teach and encourage if he or she does not have knowledge of Who Jesus is or a relationship with Him. Holy Week is a week where we can again be students, to deepen our knowledge of Christ and Christianity, and then renew our commitment to share Christ with others.

The last of my three trips was an unexpected one. I went to Asheville, North Carolina, to my former parish of the Holy Trinity, to officiate at the funeral of a dear friend named George. I don't return to that parish often, in fact, I've only gone twice in the past 15 years before this week. I gave George one of the greatest compliments, a word that I ascribe to very few people. He was, simply put, one of the most decent human beings I have ever met. He embodied **Philippians 4:8**—He was committed to truth, nobility, justice, purity, things of good report, and virtue. He spent most of his life meditating on these things. He lived to be 99. That doesn't mean his life was always easy—he lost his wife and both of his children. But his life was Christ and the church, and he also embodied **Philippians 4:13**—*I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me*. He used his faith in Christ to strengthen him and to carry him to the end. We cannot live out **Philippians 4:13**, *I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me*, if we cannot live by **Philippians 4:8**, if we've lost our sense of truth, nobility, purity, and purpose. And we cannot come to **Philippian 4:8** if we do not know **John 14:6**, if we do not know and accept Christ as the way, the truth and the life.

My three weeks away have given me a new

perspective. It makes me happy to be the priest of this community. It makes me excited for the things that are now right at our fingertips. It inspires me to dig deeper in my own faith, and to share that faith more deeply with you. I have said to many of the people I have sat down with in the capital campaign that I am your priest and I am your friend, but I am also someone who has 168 hours in his week, just like you do. And there are not enough hours to do God's work and still have a family, and time to rest, and also be a fundraiser or a builder. I'm asking, with all sincerity, please let us finish this project quickly, so that we, and I, can get back to the real work of the church, which is not to **Arise & Build** a church complex, but to **Arise & Build** people who see their own value, who value the Truth of the Gospel, the noble cause of faith, the justice that is God's standard of righteousness, the purity of service, the beauty of repentance. So let us **Arise & Build** our church complex, and in the process of this, let us **Arise & Build** our own sense of Christ—for ourselves, to those around us, and for those who are coming to us seeking truth.

My prayer for us—for you and for me—this Holy Week—is **Philippians 4:8**—*whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things*. So that we can move to **Philippians 4:13**: *I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me*. This verse is not just a cute saying, but the powerful motto of a Christ-centered person, who believes in the noble things of **Philippians 4:8**, and who has faith that Christ will walk with him or her each step of the way in finding them. You have value because you are made in the image and likeness of God. The greatest asset of the church is you, it's people. And the greatest work of the church is to **Arise & Build** souls for Christ, beginning with our own, and extending to those who are seeking His truth. So come this week and let's meditate on these things. But more important, come in two weeks so we can build on this journey. Because we don't only need this message that we have value this one week of the year. We need it every week! Have a blessed Holy Week!

SERMON-HOLY THURSDAY NIGHT HOPE COMES FROM FAITH AND KINDNESS



We've all had moments where we've felt alone, like nobody gets us, or nobody notices us, or even worse, nobody cares about us. We've all had moments where we didn't think we could walk another step. We've all had moments

where we've felt anxious, insecure, unsure. I'd venture to say that there are at least some people in church tonight who are feeling some, if not most of these things. If this describes you, please know that you are in good company. Because in the account of the Passion of Christ, told to us in Scripture, Christ felt each of these things on this day two thousand years

ago. His disciples abandoned Him. They couldn't watch with Him for one hour while He prayed. And as soon as Jesus was arrested, they all fled. Peter, who was probably His closest confidante even denied knowing Him, three times. Even after Jesus warned that it was going to happen and Peter protested that it would never happen. Jesus was so sad that He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, *"My soul is sorrowful, even unto death."* And in this moment, God did not abandon Jesus. He sent an angel to comfort Him. And Jesus did not abandon God—He resolutely prayed with faith—**THY. WILL. BE. DONE.** That's faith, when we humble ourselves to God even when it hurts, even when we don't understand why.

Tonight is not a night for a sermon. The story is Jesus Christ, and what He did two thousand years ago. There isn't much more that I can add to that. As the service continues, we will each have an opportunity to come up here and venerate the cross and spend a moment with Jesus. Thank you for being here tonight. We're one up on the disciples, at least this year. We haven't abandoned Him. We read in **I Peter 5:7**, *Cast your anxieties on Him, for He cares about you.* He cares for us to the point that He died for us—He took the beating, the mocking, the scourging, the torture, the humiliation, the pain, the loneliness, the sorrow and ultimately death—He did that for us. He gets us. So bring your anxiety here, your sorrow, your struggle, whatever cross you are carrying, bring it here, and ask Him for strength to keep carrying it, for Him to send His angels to comfort you in your time of struggle.

We've all heard the news about the shooting at FSU earlier today. We've got lots of connections between our community and the university. Today it's FSU, another day it's the mall, or the movie theater, or a church. Christ lived in a violent society, and His answer was to show love to everyone, even His enemies. He preached a Gospel of love and kindness. He didn't endorse every behavior in a spirit of tolerance, He gently corrected those who had gone astray, but He did it with kindness.

When you come up to venerate the cross, bring something of your anxiety and leave it here. And when you leave from your encounter with the Lord, take away a measure of His love and His kindness, and let's be a little more kind to one another.

There is so much hope in what we are remembering tonight—How a repentant thief found His salvation. Even the head executioner, the centurion, would eventually become a saint. The disciples who all fled, they came back and got it right. The women who stood at a distance each became a saint.

The theme for tonight is not suffering, even though we commemorate the sufferings of Christ. It is not pain, even as we have some pain from the long service. The theme for tonight is actually hope. The Crucifixion paved the way to the Resurrection. And the Resurrection brought hope back to the world. When we are filled with anger and not love, when we forget to be kind, this is when we lose hope. When we lead with

love and lead with kindness, then we reclaim hope. Let us gaze with love at Christ, as He gazes back at us with love, a love so great that He laid down His life for us, His friends. Let us think on how we can better love others, how we can be a little more kind. Anxiety crushes hope. We'll all feel a little less anxious if we had more hope. And we'd all have a little more hope if we could experience more love and more kindness.

SERMON-GOOD FRIDAY THEN WHAT?



A young man who was about to graduate from college came in to see his priest. He told the priest he was anxious about getting out of college. The priest asked "why?" The young man said "I'm really concerned about getting a good job." The priest said, "ok, then what?" Well, I want to get married. And then what? I want to have kids. And then what? I want to make a lot of money? And then what? I want to see my kids grow up, be successful in my career. And then what? Well, I hope to have grandchildren, retire, see the world. And then what? Well, I'll probably get sick at some point. And then what? Eventually I will die. And then what? And then what?

In **John 5:24**, Jesus says, *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.* This is the first verse of the Gospel reading at every funeral service. What does it mean? We will get the answer in a few minutes, when we each have the opportunity to pass under the Epitaphios. I asked our young children this morning, how many of them play sports, and most of them do. So they understand that when you play basketball and you are four years old, the coach is trying to get you to understand that the ball is supposed to go into the basket. They don't talk about pick and rolls, or zone defense. The baseball coach of the four year old team is just trying to get them to hit the ball and then run in the right direction. They aren't talking stealing bases, or throwing curveballs. The successful athlete becomes successful because of two things—first, the repetition that comes through practice. And second, a deeper understanding of the game that comes through experience.

When we were two years old and people taught us about Christ, we were taught *"God is good."* And for a two-year old that is enough. If there are young children here tonight, we will guide them to walk under the Epitaphios, just like we picked them up to venerate the cross and the tomb. But a two-year old understanding of God is not going to inspire an adult to be a Christian on a daily basis. The Holy Week experience is just a box to check off for some of us—walk through the rituals, and we'll see you next Holy Week. Let me tell you why that's a bad choice. The ritual of walking under the Epitaphios is practice for **John 5:24**, the ultimate then what, that is going to

happen to each of us. At some point, we will die, you, me, everyone. And we will pass from death, to one of two places—eternal life, or eternal condemnation. And if our understanding of God, is that He is a box to check once a year, or in times of crisis, it's hard to imagine that we will pass from death to eternal life.

God has laid out a unique path to eternal life for each person. It's our choice to walk it. God is rooting for us. He wants us to make it. Three weeks ago, I was in California, I went to confession to my Spiritual Father who serves in San Francisco. It is so important that I go to confession that I fly out to San Francisco once a year to do just that. One of the things I confessed is that I'm struggling with my private relationship with God. I pray often with people—in these services, at meetings, at the end of appointments, and many times even over the phone. I enjoy that. And I think people enjoy being the recipient of prayer. Yet, I struggle to pray alone. I always have. The reason we go to confession is not just to admit our shortcomings, but to get advice, direction and encouragement. My Spiritual Father, in addressing this concern that I have, said to me, "Maybe one of the reasons that God called you to be a priest is that He knew you would struggle with private prayer, and so you have the opportunity and the desire to pray with others many times a day." Instead of feeling bad for myself, I actually felt uplifted. Yes, I still have some work to do on my personal prayer life, but it is with the encouragement that my path is unique, and that a challenge need not be seen as a defeat, but an opportunity.

In passing from death to life, we will go first to the judgment seat of Christ, and He will evaluate how well we've walked our own unique path. That is why we shouldn't always be so concerned about how others are doing on their paths, or why we didn't get a different path. Our passing under the Epitaphios this year should not just be a ritual, but practice for the day we do it for real, a reminder of not only the reality of death, but the potential joy of eternal life.

For the past year, we have been gearing up for a capital campaign called "**Arise & Build**." We've talked about it this spring in sermons, presentations and articles. The name of our campaign is based on **Nehemiah 2:18**—*Let us arise and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work.* This is not only a catchy phrase for our project, but a good metaphor for our every day life.

Let's look for a moment at the role hands played in the Passion of Christ. The hands of Christ, first, were pierced with nails as He was affixed to the cross for our salvation. One thief on the cross next to Jesus never met Jesus until that moment. His hands also were nailed to a cross—they never came together for a prayer, they never came together to help someone in need. Yet, the thief was the first to enter into Paradise, because in his heart he perceived the divinity of Christ, and he also did one good thing, when he showed concern for the salvation of the other thief. Judas put out his hands to accept thirty pieces of silver in exchange for betraying the Lord. Pontius Pilate



washed his hands of responsibility. Soldiers

grasped whips in their hands and used their hands to plait a crown of thorns and used these devices to torture the Son of God. Women carried spices in their hands as they came to anoint Jesus after He

died. The crowds used their hands to wave palms, but five days later, they raised fists of anger demanding the Christ be crucified. That we have hands is not what makes us unique. It's what we do with those hands. Do we **arise and build**, or demolish and tear down? Do we use our hands for good work or for destruction? And do we take the time to strengthen our hands for Godly things by putting them together to pray, or by opening a Bible to read it. How often do our hands light a candle in church or get raised to God in worship? How are we using our hands to make our way down our unique path.

Psalm 119:73 "*Your hands have made and fashioned me, grant me understanding and I will learn Your commandments.*" His hands made our hands, it is up to us to grow in our understanding, so that we not only learn, but so that we apply what we have learned. It is a personal choice to embrace our unique path to salvation or not.

Some of you who are here tonight I don't see as often as I wish I did. I've never been a fan of criticizing people who come in order to make a point to the people who don't. I'm glad everyone is here tonight. There is a lot of work to do in the church. And it is good work. It is the best work actually. For what work is more important than offering people Christ—and all that He is—hope, purpose, joy, love, optimism, destination, and blessing. We need lots of hands to make it happen. The church doesn't need us as much as we need the church—to teach us, to guide us, to encourage us, to keep us accountable, to pick us up when we are down, to refocus us when we've lost our path.

My favorite moments of Holy Week are when we all sing together, whether it is the Lamentations, or a simple Lord have mercy. Because it is at these moments when we are unified in purpose and in praise that we experience little pieces of heaven, which will hopefully sustain us on our way to our personal epitaphios experience at the end of our lives. Lots of us are anxious about our "then what's"—we go from one conquest to another, from one goal to another. Nothing wrong with that. However, there are two things that are missing when our life is like this. We forget the ultimate then what. And we chase joys and achievements that are temporary, forgetting about the one that is eternal.

PASCHAL SERMON **HOW CAN WE KNOW CHRIST?**

How can we know Christ? Is it possible? Is it possible to have a mind that thinks like Christ? Is it possible to

have a heart that beats in sync with His? A study of Scripture says the answer is YES. **Psalm 46:10** reads: *Be still, and know that I am God.* The first step in knowing Christ is to be still. In the world today, it is hard to be still. In fact, some of us are so busy, we don't make time to be still, or even worse, we are not comfortable with being still. Worship affords us an opportunity to be still, at least in body. So does prayer, and Scripture reading. Slowing down the body will give the heart, the mind and the soul an opportunity to be quiet as well. Elijah encountered God, we are told in **I Kings 19**, not in the strong wind that rent the mountains, or an earthquake that broke rocks in pieces, not in a fire, but in a still, small voice. If knowing Christ is important in your life, you'll make the time to be still, to quiet the self from the noise, so there is room to hear His voice.

We began this Holy Week journey last Sunday, reflecting on **St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians, 4:8**: *Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.* Jesus reveals Himself as **THE way, THE truth and THE life**. We spend our lives searching for truth and meaning—whether it is the unceasing political debate and which side is right, or whether it is always insisting we are right and not listening to others, or pushing ourselves ahead to the detriment of others. Nobility is a hard thing. Society is conditioning us that winning comes at all costs, even if you have to sell your soul to do it, and that it's all about the scoreboard—who has more—points, money, titles, etc. On God's scoreboard, four can be more than six, if someone starts with two and makes four, and if someone else starts out with five and makes six. God rewards effort, not necessarily what society defines as success. If we want to know Christ, the focus should be on effort, not necessarily outcome.

The Bible repeatedly teaches us that our focus should be on the present. Jesus teaches us in **Matthew 6:34**, *Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the DAY'S own trouble be sufficient for the day.* And **Psalm 118:24** reads *This is the DAY that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.* Each day we wake up, we have a choice—to be grateful and joyful for the opportunities at hand, or to be anxious and troubled about the big picture. Christ found time to be alone and pray, no matter how busy He was. Christ had thousands of people coming at Him for healing and teaching, and not once when someone called out "Lord," was He too busy to answer. If we want to know Christ, we have to find the ability to be present, and take things a day at a time, to see possibilities and to see people, to take time not merely to hear, but to really listen, to not merely look, but really see.

St. Paul writes in **I Corinthians 13:4-6**, *Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the*

right. Christ was the embodiment of love. If you swap out Christ for the word love in this passage, it still reads true. Christ is patient and kind. Christ does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Does this passage read as truth if we put our own name in it? Are we patient? Are we kind? Are we optimistic? Christ is not a glass half-empty person. He wasn't with the thief on the cross, or the sinful woman that anointed His feet, or with Peter who denied Him, or the disciples who abandoned Him. He had every reason to look away from each of these people, but instead He still saw good in them. He still sees good in each of us. Should we not strive to see the good in each other? On Holy Thursday night, I spoke about kindness. I challenged us (and I'm included in that us) to think on how we can better love others, how we can be a little more kind. We know that most of us suffer from some level of anxiety. As I mentioned the other night, anxiety crushes hope. We'll all feel a little less anxious if we had more hope. And we'd all have a little more hope if we could experience more love and more kindness. And maybe we would experience just a little more love and more kindness if WE could be a little more kind and optimistic.

Here is the opportunity—the hymns tonight invite us to *"Let us begin anew in the light of the Resurrected Christ."* This is the DAY we have—yesterday is over, tomorrow is not a guarantee. Let us then receive this light of Christ and really give ourselves a new start—let's make plans to be still. Let's learn what is noble and right and true. Let's focus on effort. Let's be present in each moment. And let's learn how to love better, by working to be patient and kind, seeing the glass as half full and not half empty. Christ was all about new starts—there are so many times in the Bible He gave someone a new lease on life by not only releasing them from illness, but releasing them from the burden of sin, and guilt and all that goes with it. Receive the light of Christ and give yourself a new lease on life, a life that focuses not on your truth, but His. And give a new lease on life to those around you as well—by choosing kindness and optimism. If we want to really know Christ, and if we want a heart that beats in sync with His, this is the way to do it. Focus on what is noble, right and true, as Christ defines these. Be present. Be patient. Be kind. Be optimistic. And be still. And we will know Christ.

My prayer to close our Lenten journey this year is one verse, taken from **Psalm 50:10**—*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a NEW and RIGHT spirit within me.* Amen.



A MESSAGE FROM OUR MINISTRY COORDINATOR

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.**

Christ is Risen!

This monthly article will continue to break down these beautiful verses from St. Peter's Epistle one phrase at a time. This month, we are nearly at the end, with the last few words of verse 11 of St. Peter's writing **"...To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever."**

As we discussed last month, we all have the same calling: to glorify God in everything we do. As a near conclusion, Peter reiterates this message by nearly repeating what he had just said, emphasizing the importance of these few words. This doxology is used countless times in scripture and in Orthodox Christian worship. Its power is in its simplicity. If we only manage to utter these few words in prayer, we would be saying quite a lot:

- **"To Him belong glory":**

This acknowledges that all praise, honor, and recognition rightfully belong to God, not to any other being or creation.

- **"and dominion":**

"Dominion" signifies God's absolute power and authority over all things, both in the present and in the future.

- **"forever and ever.":**

This emphasizes the eternal nature of God's reign and power, which knows no end.

Glory and dominion are His, regardless of how we feel about it. Peter is not telling us to give Him something that He will not have otherwise. We are being called on to recognize that honor (glory) and strength (dominion) belong to God. Any honor and strength that we might have comes from Him. This is true since before the

world began (forever) until after the world shall end (and ever).

Dominion is not a word that we use often. Here it carries the sense of controlling power to direct or determine (and govern). Christ rules and reigns over all creation, both now and forever. Dominion says there is no higher authority. Dominion manifests power complete in a perfected state. It is more than authority, it is the inherent power to bring about life, it is the freedom to exercise power both physically and spiritually. Divine dominion means keeping a promise and making everything whole. It is the ability to guarantee a covenant.

Many of us are familiar with the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. He was a prolific writer of music, thousands of scores, and a devout Christian. At the end of each piece of music he wrote, he inscribed the letters S.D.G., Latin for Solo Deo Gloria, translated To God alone be the Glory. He also believed that music was a powerful tool for proclaiming the gospel which is clearly seen in his cantatas, passions, organ chorales, and other compositions. The motto served as a reminder that Bach's music, like all of life, should be lived in service to God, rather than for personal gain or recognition.

What could this look like for us, that at the end of every phone call, email, text, or any other communication, we ended with the phrase **"To God alone be the Glory!"**

May we always be reminded to ensure that all of our life - our thoughts, our actions, our words, our relationships, our time commitments, the use of our money, the stewardship of our resources, the demonstration of our generosity, the attitudes we display - glorify the glory and dominion of our great God!

Maria



LITURGICAL SCHEDULE FOR MAY

Sunday, May 4	<u>SUNDAY OF THE MYRRH-BEARING WOMEN</u> Orthros 8:45 a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00 a.m.
Monday, May 5	<u>ST. IRENE THE MARTYR</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00 a.m.
Thursday, May 8	<u>ST. JOHN THE THEOLOGIAN</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00 a.m.
Sunday, May 11	<u>SUNDAY OF THE PARALYTIC</u> Orthros 8:45 a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00 a.m.
Wednesday, May 14	<u>MID-PENTECOST</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00 a.m.
Thursday, May 15	<u>FR. STAVROS ANNIVERSARY OF ORDINATION— ST. PACHOMIOS</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00 a.m.
Sunday, May 18	<u>SUNDAY OF THE SAMARITAN WOMAN</u> Orthros 8:45 a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00 a.m.
Wednesday, May 21	<u>STS. CONSTANTINE AND HELEN</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00 a.m.
Sunday, May 25	<u>SUNDAY OF THE BLIND MAN</u> Orthros 8:45 a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00 a.m.
Tuesday, May 27	<u>LEAVE-TAKING OF PASCHA (APODOSIS)</u> Orthros 5:00 p.m.	Divine Liturgy	6:00 p.m.
Thursday, May 29	<u>HOLY ASCENSION OF OUR LORD</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00 a.m.
Sunday, June 1	<u>HOLY FATHERS OF THE FIRST ECUMENICAL COUNCIL</u> Orthros 8:45 a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00 a.m.
Saturday, June 7	<u>THE SATURDAY OF SOULS</u> Orthros 8:45 a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00 a.m.
Sunday, June 8	<u>HOLY PENTECOST</u> Orthros 8:30 a.m. Kneeling Vespers 11:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy	9:45 a.m.



LITURGICAL NOTES FOR MAY

Sunday, May 4- Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women- They came to anoint Jesus' body, but found an EMPTY tomb. We also commemorate Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

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

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

Sunday, May 11 - Sunday of the Paralytic- The healing of the paralytic who was afflicted for many years. This event bears witness to Christ's authority over the human body: He who can overcome death in His own body has power over all human flesh.

Wednesday, May 14-- Feast of Mid-Pentecost- The icon depicts Christ the teacher, foreshadows the teaching to the Samaritan Woman, celebrated the following Sunday, and it is the feast day of teachers. About the middle of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus went up again to the Temple and taught. The Jews, marveling at the wisdom of His words, said, "How does this man know letters having never learned?" But Christ first reproached their unbelief and lawlessness, then proved to them by the Law that they sought to slay Him unjustly, supposedly as a despiser of the Law, since He had healed the paralytic on the Sabbath. This feast is held mid-way between Pascha and Pentecost.

Thursday, May 15 - Fr. Stavros' Anniversary of Ordination - Fr. Stavros was ordained to the Holy Priesthood of the Greek Orthodox Church on May 15, 1998. This will mark his 27th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. Every year, Fr. Stavros marks this anniversary by celebrating Divine Liturgy in thanksgiving for the gift of priestly ministry.

Sunday, May 18 - Sunday of the Samaritan Woman- Christ talks about the water of eternal life which will never make us thirst again. The woman here is St. Photini.

Wednesday, May 21 - Sts. Constantine and Helen- May 21 commemorates the feast of Sts. Constantine and Helen. St. Constantine was the emperor of the Roman Empire who decided to make Christianity the official religion of the empire. For the first time in history, the Christian church would not fall under persecution. St. Constantine also moved the capital of the Empire from Rome to Constantinople (present day Istanbul, Turkey), where he inaugurated the Byzantine Empire which flourished from 325 until 1453. He also convened the first Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in the year 325, which inaugurated what is known as the "golden age of Orthodoxy," and resulted in the writing of the Nicene Creed (edited to its current version in the year 381). St. Helen, the mother of St. Constantine, is recognized as being the person who found the true cross of Christ in Jerusalem. She went on a pilgrimage to the Holy City and searched diligently for the Cross, finding it under a patch of Basil (Vasiliko) on the Mountain of Golgotha. Sts. Constantine and Helen have the title Isapostolou, "Equal to the Apostles" because of the tremendous contributions they made to the Orthodox Christian Church.

Wednesday, May 21, Paraklesis—We will offer our monthly Paraklesis on Wednesday, May 21, from 6:00-7:00 p.m. We offer Paraklesis once a month, so we can pray for all of our parishioners by name. You are encouraged to attend this service to pray for any names and needs that you may have.

Sunday, May 25 - Sunday of the Blind Man - The theme of LIGHT! Commemoration of the healing of the blind man which leads us to the reality of the healing of our own spiritual blindness.

Tuesday, May 27- Apodosis (Leave-Taking) of Pascha -This marks the end of the Paschal Season. It is a repeat of the Resurrection Service and Liturgy of Pascha and is the last time of the Liturgical year that we sing Χριστός Ανέστη. We will celebrate this feast on Tuesday, May 27, with an evening Liturgy at 6:00 p.m. (Orthros will begin at 5:00 p.m. and is a replication of the Resurrection Service from Pascha).

Thursday, May 29 - Ascension - This marks the feast where Christ ascended to heaven, 40 days after the Resurrection, thus completing His earthly ministry.

Sunday, June 1—Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council—We pay homage to the collective triumph of the Church over false doctrine. The first Ecumenical Council authored the Creed. It took place in Nicaea in the year 325. This is why we call the Creed "The Nicene Creed." This Council also established the date of Pascha and decided on which books would comprise the Bible. This commemoration is always done the Sunday after Ascension.

Saturday, June 7- Saturday of Souls—There are four Saturdays set aside during the year for us to honor our loved ones who have fallen asleep. One of them is the Saturday before Pentecost, this year on June 7. We will have Divine Liturgy and a memorial service that day. Please send the list of names of those whom you would like to have commemorated (separate sheet provided). You may bring kolyva as you wish. We will not be having a communal kolyva (hopefully this will resume next year), so each family will take their own back.



COMMUNITY NEWS

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 May the dates are:** Tuesday May 6, Tuesday May 13, Tuesday May 20 & Tuesday May 27.

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 May, the dates are:** Tuesday May 6, Tuesday May 13 & Tuesday May 20.

"ORTHODOXY 201 CLASS" TO BEGIN - Father John will conduct a 6-week class beginning Thursday, May 1st at 6:30 pm in the Church Hall. This class is intended for Inquirers who are interested in learning more about the Orthodox Faith and for those interested in being received into the Orthodox Church. It will supplement Father Stavros' "Orthodoxy 101 Classes." Please contact the Church Office to sign up for the class. Materials will be provided for the course. The classes for May will be on Thursday May 1, Thursday May 8, Thursday May 22 & Thursday May 29. The classes for June will be on Thursday June 5 & Thursday June 12. The classes will be from 6:30pm-8:00pm.

Men's Group- Our men's group will meet on Sunday, May 4 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 May will be "Reflections on our Recent Holy Week Journey."

GOYA Meeting June 1- No Meeting in May- There will not be a GOYA meeting in May. The June GOYA meeting will be Sunday, June 1. We will welcome our new GOYAns and bid farewell to the graduating ones. We will also be planning for the Junior Olympics. The Junior Olympics deadline is June 2, for all of our GOYAns who are participating in the Junior Olympics.

Young Adults- Our young adult group meets once a month for dinner/discussion (and other times for fellowship and service). The meeting for May will be on Thursday, May 15 from 7:00-9:00 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. All young adults, ages 18-40, are invited to participate. The Topic for "Spirituality Throughout the Cycles of Life." Group Members use What's App for communication. Please contact Aris Rogers to be added to our what's app for young adults at 813-309-5525.

Junior Olympics Help Needed- The annual GOYA Sunstate Junior Olympics will be held on June 7-9, hosted by our parish. Dwight Forde heads the ministry. We need help from volunteers for the weekend. A constant contact will be sent out to our entire community around May 15 letting you know what help is needed. Please utilize the SignUpGenius connected to this constant contact to volunteer some time that weekend. We need lots of help and you don't need to have a child in GOYA to help out.

Congratulations to our Graduates—If you have a student who is graduating, please email all information to the church office by Thursday, May 15 so we can include graduates in the June/July issue of The Messenger! Please provide: Name and Picture of the graduate, the institution graduating from, any degree, in the case of a college graduate, and what college the person plans to attend, in the case of the high school graduate.

PARISH REGISTRY

BAPTISM— Axyle Duncan Tyler Jackson was baptized on March 19. Noah Schatzline was the Godparent. Congratulations!

BAPTISM— Zoe Rose Krajacic, daughter of Joseph Krajacic and Alyssa Skijus, was baptized on March 23. George and Zeina Fellios were the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

BAPTISM— Robert Stuart Lewis III, was baptized on March 26. Dr. Nick Fallieras was the sponsor. Congratulations!

CHRISMATION— Anthony Wayne Garcia was chrismated on March 19. Catherine Mitseas was the sponsor. Congratulations!

CHRISMATION— Lilliana Mae (Mary) Garcia was chrismated on March 19. Presbyteria Denise Stefero was the sponsor. Congratulations!

CHRISMATION— Steven Alexander Garcia was chrismated on March 19. Markos Mangarides was the sponsor. Congratulations!

CHRISMATION— Joshua David Wall was chrismated on March 19. Ekaterini Mangarides was the sponsor. Congratulations!

CHRISMATION— Isaac Anthony Wall was chrismated on March 19. Maria Xenick was the sponsor. Congratulations!

CHRISMATION— David James Charles Stuart was chrismated on March 19. Michael Wenditz was the sponsor. Congratulations!

CHRISMATION— Katherine Pierce-Renzulli was chrismated on March 23. Elefteria Hambos was the sponsor. Congratulations!

CHRISMATION— Sean Alan (Joseph) Stimatz was chrismated on April 2. Michael Kavouklis was the sponsor. Congratulations!

CHRISMATION— Jonathan Daniel Larrea was chrismated on April 9. Kosta Kossaris was the sponsor. Congratulations!

FUNERAL— Georgia Diamantakes, passed away on March 26. Her funeral was held on April 1. May her memory be eternal!

INSPIRATION

God Is Talking To You My Child...

Every good gift that you received comes from my hand...James 1:17

*For I am your provider and I meet all your needs...
St. Matthew 6:31-33*

My plan for your future has always been filled with hope...Jeremiah 29:11

*Because I love you with an everlasting love...
Jeremiah 31:3*

My thoughts toward you are countless as the sand on the seashore...Psalm 139:17-18

To be continued...

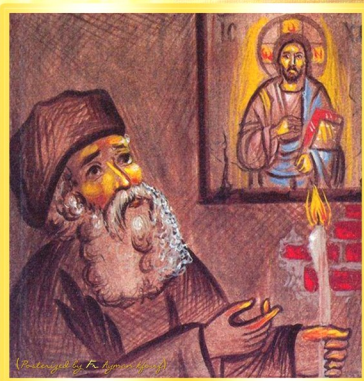
We recently heard someone say they'd split from their spouse because "I fell out of love." God's love was never designed to be something you "fall into" or "out of." Love is an action and a choice, not a feeling. Commit to it and choose to love, even at times when you don't "feel it." (This applies to our spouses, our children, our friends, and to God).

Everyone of us is an image of God, and everyone of us is like a damaged icon. But if we were given an icon damaged by time, by circumstances, or desecrated by human hatred, we would treat it with reverence, with tenderness, with broken-heartedness. We would not pay attention primarily to the fact that it is damaged, but to the tragedy of its being damaged. We would concentrate on what is left of its beauty and not what is lost of its beauty. And this is what we must learn to do with regard to each person as an individual, but also – and this is not always as easy – with regard to groups of people, whether it be a parish or a denomination, or a nation. We must learn to look, and look until we have seen the underlying beauty of this group of people. Only then can we even begin to do something to call out all the beauty that is there. Listen to other people, and whenever you discern that something sounds true, which is a revelation of harmony and beauty, emphasize it and help it to flower. Strengthen it and encourage it to live. ~

by Archbishop Anthony Bloom

the EON
THEOPHONY

WATCH YOUR THOUGHTS
FOR THEY BECOME WORDS
WATCH YOUR WORDS
FOR THEY BECOME ACTIONS
WATCH YOUR ACTIONS
FOR THEY BECOME HABITS
WATCH YOUR HABITS
FOR THEY BECOME CHARACTER
WATCH YOUR CHARACTER
FOR IT BECOMES YOUR DESTINY



JOY TWEENS

Welcome to the 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 2025

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

Sunday, May 18: All Youth - End of Year Party

Our JOY Tweens Ministry is having an amazing year so far! On January 26, we held our second annual Parent-Tween Retreat where our JOY Tweens and their parents enjoyed small group discussions on topics of prayer, positive thinking and the impacts of smartphones and social media on our youth. Thank you to all those who joined us and a special thanks to Father Stavros, Mary Ann Konstas and Maria Xenick for leading our discussions! On

February 23, our tweens had fun together defying gravity at Altitude Trampoline Park Tampa. We're looking forward to more exciting activities this year!

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

We pray that everyone had a beautiful and enriching PASCHA. Approximately **50 students** actively participated in the many services of Holy Week and Pascha, which makes the week very special. As always our Altar Boys did a fabulous job throughout the many services. Our Maidens for the Bridegroom Services on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday evening were adorable. For the first time we had students read the Epistle during the afternoon Holy Unction service. Our seven Myrrh Bearers did a beautiful job serving during the Good Friday Lamentation Service. We are so proud of all of our students' devotion to our Lord.

We would like to thank the families who attended the Saturday of Lazarus Service on **April 12th**. We had a beautiful service, nice breakfast, and afterwards our children and parents helped to make over **800 crosses for Palm Sunday**.

It was wonderful to see all of our Sunday School Students participate in the **PROCESSION OF THE PALMS** on Palm Sunday, **April 13th**. Afterwards we took a group Sunday School photo on the steps of the church. This new photo is up on the Sunday School bulletin board.

Our Holy Friday Retreat on **April 18th** was a huge success. That day was filled with learning activities and worship. Thank you Zackie Ameres and Tia L'Hommedieu for coordinating this event and leading the Ministry of HOPE and JOY. Also, thank you to all the parents and teachers who assisted in this important retreat. By the way, our teens wrapped over **500 red eggs for Pascha** on Friday and cut all the greenery for the Holy Saturday morning service. Truly we are raising such dedicated STEWARDS of St. John's Greek Orthodox Church.

Our TOPICS for April were **TALENTS AND GIFTS, ST. MARY OF EGYPT, PALM SUNDAY, HOLY WEEK, PASCHA, SAINTS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH, AND DOUBTING THOMAS**.

Our last day of Sunday School, Graduation, and The End of the Year Party is on **May 18th**. More details to follow in the weekly Sunday School Constant Contact.

We are already starting to plan for the next Sunday School year. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO TEACH OR ASSIST IN OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM and/or if you have any suggestions on how we can improve our Sunday School Program, please e-mail Vickie Peckham at **vickiepeckham@gmail.com** or call her at **813-758-3102**.

DATES TO REMEMBER:


Sun., May 4th: TOPIC: The Ascension

Sun., May 11th: TOPIC: Pentecost

Sun., May 18th: Last Day of Sunday School - YOUTH SUNDAY

Sunday School Graduation Ceremony for all Students

Sunday School End of the Year Party on CAMPUS



SUNDAY SCHOOL PHOTOS



This is a photo of our students getting ready to act out the Story of the Paralytic.



The photo below is of the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival speakers. The Senior Division speakers were Vasilios Panos and Kenneth Kane. Our Junior Division Speakers were Aspasia Panos, Ava Justice, Philip Kane, and Steven Garcia. Congratulations to all of them.



This photo reminds us that when we light our candles in the Narthex, we should remember that Jesus is the Light of the World. The Narthex prepares us to enter the church, The House of God.



The photo below is of the Pre-K3 project of St. John of the Ladder.



This photo is of our Pre-K4 students with their project about St. John of the Ladder.



These are photos of our students filling the eighty Bags of Love.



The 5th graders made Communion Cloth Sets to go with the Chalices and Patens that they previously made in class. The small cross is for the Chalice, the medium cross is for the Paten, and the rectangular one is called the Aer. This is the cloth that Father shakes when we are reciting The Creed. This shaking represents the earthquake that occurred when Jesus died on the cross. The photo below is of Louis Mantzanas Communion Cloth Set.

YOUNG AT HEART

YOUNG AT HEART MAY GATHERING

Join Us
Saturday, May 17th
1-3pm



*Potluck luncheon followed by a
presentation on*
St. Photini – The Samaritan Woman

*Please reply to Presvytera Denise no
later than **May 11th** with number
attending and dish you will bring for the
luncheon.*

BOOKSTORE

***Christ is Risen!
Truly He is Risen!***

*Having risen from the
grave, as He foretold,*

*He has given us
Eternal Life and the
Great Mercy. (The Resurrection Ode)*



*With gratitude for your support and
with prayers for God's blessings
in this Holy Season of Pascha!*

*Presvytera Denise, Elaina Stefero,
Diane Trimis
Your Bookstore Staff*

STEWARDSHIP

Christos Anesti! We hope your Lenten journey brought you and your family peace and a feeling of renewal. It was gratifying to see our church so full during Holy Week. Thank you to Father Stavros and his staff for offering such beautiful and moving services.

We are off to a good start in 2025. As of April 1st, 2025 families have returned their Stewardship forms, and another **70** have contributed without turning in a form. That's **272** total families and individuals who have answered the call, resulting in **\$508,000** given and committed so far. Please let us hear from you today, if you haven't submitted your pledge form.

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

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

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

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.

College Student Contact Information

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



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.

FOOD PANTRY

FOOD PANTRY AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Jesus said, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.'
Matthew 14:16



The Food Pantry at St. John the Baptist helps support our ministry efforts throughout the year, along with many faith-based organizations in Tampa Bay. On the 3rd Saturday of each month volunteers gather for our Community Outreach at Tampa Hope in support of Matthew 25, the Outreach for First Presbyterian. In April we prepared Easter Themed Gift Bags for the residents. Their gratitude is abundant, and your donations make all the difference! The smiling faces of our volunteers and the residents are contagious, and the Love of God is evident in midst of transition and difficulties.

Please keep our Food Pantry in mind when you come to Church and look for our dedicated drop off just past entrance area of the Church Hall. We also accept grocery store gift cards of \$20 denominations or less in the church office. Your support makes all the difference. If you know of someone in need or wish to take a bag of groceries to go, we can make that happen! Please contact Sandra Pappas at 813-785-3747 – If you have ideas to share, please don't hesitate to reach out!

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

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



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: 4/19, 5/17 & 6/21.

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

To Volunteer: [Click Here](https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0F48A5A62DA3F49-community1/8067245#/), (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.



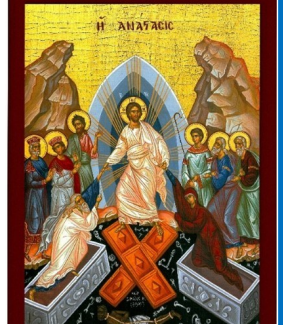
'Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men' Colossians 3:23

DAUGHTERS OF PENELOPE

Daughters of Penelope Alcmaeon #167 Tampa

Χριστός Ανέστη! - Christ is Risen!

**MAY THE RISEN LORD BLESS YOU WITH HEALTH, STRENGTH,
HOPE, AND ENDLESS JOY!**



The Daughters proudly carried the banner with our mission to promote Hellenism, Philanthropy, Education, Civic Responsibility, Family and Individual Excellence at the in the Greek Independence Day Parade in Tarpon on the 23rd of March. The daughters participated in scheduled meetings, sponsored with AHEPA the April 2nd Wednesday evening Pre-Sanctified Dinner and decorated the HALL for the 25th March celebrations.



The Daughters of Penelope - Tarpon

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.

TWELVE DISCIPLES PROJECT

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

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

Are you interested???

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

"Prayer is doxology, praise, thanksgiving, confession, supplication, and intercession to God. 'When I prayed I was new,' wrote a great theologian of Christian antiquity, 'but when I stopped praying I became old. Prayer is the way to renewal and spiritual life. Prayer is aliveness to God. Prayer is strength, refreshment, and joy. Through the grace of God and our disciplined efforts prayer lifts us up from our isolation to a conscious, loving communion with God in which everything is experienced in a new light. Prayer becomes a personal dialogue with God, a spiritual breathing of the soul, a foretaste of the bliss of God's kingdom." <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-fruits-of-true-prayer?inheritRedirect=true> "Pray for others by name and ask people to pray for you, too. The Church is a praying Body. When we pray for others, we lift them up and embrace them. It connects us in Christ, no matter how far away our loved ones may be from us. Prayer is even more intimate when we offer up specific people, by name, (and their specific needs) to the Lord." (Sam Williams, blogs.goarch.org, Sept. 24, 2015)

Participating requires no special talent, no physical ability, no financial investment but only a desire to offer up prayerful love or your fellow members of the St. John the Baptist congregation. There are no restrictions. You may choose a time during the day when you can spend a quiet moment with God. Mathew Balasis led this ministry since its inception in 2020. With his recent passing, we are looking for someone to direct this ministry and hope to fill this in the next month. **Memory Eternal Mathew!**

~Participation will warm your spiritual heart.~



SCHOOL OF GREEK LANGUAGE & CULTURE

GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY

PARADE



On Sunday, March 23rd the students, parents and teachers of the School of Greek Language and Culture for the third year in a row participated in the parade for the Greek Independence Day which took place in Tarpon Springs.



Holding Greek flags and full of enthusiasm were gathered at Lemon Street and they paraded with all the other groups shouting **ΖΗΤΩ Η ΕΛΛΑΔΑ! (LONG LIVE GREECE!)**

It was an amazing experience for everyone and a great opportunity to honor our homeland, Greece!



A Special Thank You to our children who recited their poems at the Greek Independence Day Program on March 30th!

NURSING MINISTRY

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, where we aim to raise awareness, fight stigmas, and prioritize the importance of emotional, psychological, and social well-being. This month provides an opportunity for the world to focus on supporting those who struggle with their mental health. Optimal mental health means that the individual can participate in the world fully and to the best of their ability. Each of us is so unique. When our mental health is serving us, we can offer the world our best.



When our mental health is optimal our psychological well-being reflects it. We recognize our unique strengths and weaknesses. We are free to ask for the help and support we need so our problem-solving abilities are sufficient to meet any challenge we take on. Our sense of security and confidence can withstand challenges and hardship. We remain optimistic in the face of adversity. We are satisfied with our life and enjoy pursuing new goals.

An important part of our mental health management is understanding when your mental health is on the decline. By learning the signs, you can better identify when you or someone you care about is having a difficult time. Sometimes, it can be difficult to see when you start sliding if you are mentally ill. Having a loved one who can notice for you can be so helpful. It's much easier to connect when you can approach someone you care about and say, "Hey, you haven't been eating or sleeping well recently. Is everything okay with you?"

Common signs your mental health is declining.

1. Increase in symptoms and severity.

If you live with a mental illness, there are symptoms of that mental illness that will pop up. For example, if you have anxiety, you may find that you are fixating on problems, have difficulty controlling feelings of worry, experience an increase in anger or depression, feel overwhelmed, and struggle with sleep issues. In general, you may be able to manage those symptoms. But when your mental health is deteriorating, you may find that they are becoming more intense and problematic.

What to do? Increases in symptoms and their severity may have a direct cause. Stress is a big factor when it comes to worsening symptoms. Any way to lessen your stress, get more sleep, and maintain your self-care may help. Exercises like walking, running, and yoga can all help mitigate stress. And reduce contact with stressful people if at all possible.

2. Personal hygiene.

A lack of self-care and letting personal hygiene go are common symptoms that your mental health is getting worse. Why would you bother showering if you don't have the energy for it and you're just going to spend the whole day in bed? What's the point of brushing your teeth when you don't deserve to be clean? Wash and comb your hair? Why bother? Personal hygiene is an important part of social norm. When that starts to slide, it should be cause for concern.

3. Punishing yourself.

You may find yourself punishing yourself for mistakes or perceived mistakes. Some examples include calling yourself stupid, making yourself feel as though you are unworthy, self-harming, withholding pleasure, or withholding meals. If you experience an uptick or desire to self-harm or punish yourself, the best thing you can do is seek out help from a professional before it can get worse. This road can easily lead to suicide attempts if it's allowed to go too far.

4. Feeling depressed.

Depression can be a tricky thing. There are a lot of causes of depression. Often, when people hear "depression," they think of it in the context of a mental illness, like Major Depression Disorder. However, not everyone who experiences depression has a depression disorder. Depression can be a symptom of various things like physical ailments, other mental illnesses, unmanaged stress, and difficult life situations. What to do? There are several ways you can try to combat increasing depression. Things like exercise, getting out in the sun, reducing stress, not eating junk food, and staying away from sugar can help. However, it's not always that simple. If you are experiencing chronic depression or your depression is getting worse, you'd want to talk to a mental health professional.

5. Isolating from family and friends.

People experiencing mental health problems often isolate themselves from their friends and family. There are several reasons why. First, many mentally ill people, or those going through a hard time, don't want to feel like a burden to their loved ones. It also requires a lot of emotional energy to pretend to be okay in front of other people that know you well. And then, of course, you also have the depletion of emotional energy because of depression or other problems.

What to do? Force yourself to go out. Force yourself to reach out to friends, family members, or other people that care about you. Force yourself to try to socialize, even if it's not great. If you can spend some time with understanding and supportive people, that's even better. Getting out there around other people allows you to interrupt the negative thought processes you may experience when alone.

6. Difficulty concentrating.

Mental health issues often come with cognitive and focus issues. When you're struggling with your mental health, you may find

that you have a harder time making sense of things that would normally be no problem for you. You may not be able to focus on anything for an extended time and be easily distracted. What to do? Sometimes rest can help you reboot your brain when you're experiencing this symptom. A nap may be enough to alleviate it. However, if you find it persistent, it would be best to talk to a professional. There aren't many ways to self-manage a loss of concentration or cognitive difficulties.

7. Unexplained mood shifting.

Unexpected or unexplained mood shifts can point to declining mental health. There are times when it is perfectly normal to experience a mood shift. Something negative happening, stress, lower-case "a" anxiety, and hardship can all cause someone to feel down in the dumps. That should be expected. On the other hand, when your mood shifts for no tangible reason, moves deep into depression, or you feel absolutely elated for no reason, you should then be concerned.

What to do? Peace and quiet can help alleviate mood shifts. Do something that makes you feel good unless you're experiencing an unexplained elation. Unexplained mood shifts can also point toward mental illnesses. They should prompt a visit to a mental health professional to discuss what you're experiencing.

8. Feelings of guilt.

There are healthy and unhealthy times to experience guilt. Obviously, a healthy time to experience guilt is when you unintentionally do something wrong or hurt someone. That's your brain telling you that you did something wrong and should try to fix it. However, some people experience guilt for no reason or in seemingly benign situations. That can point to things like mental illness, trauma, or abuse.

What to do? Dealing with guilt can be a difficult thing to self-manage without the help of a counselor. That guilt often comes from poor self-esteem, which skews a person's ability to read social situations accurately. Try to focus on cause and effect. Is there a direct, tangible reason to feel the guilt? Did you do something wrong? If you did, try to fix it and do better.

9. Changing appetite or fluctuations in weight.

Certain symptoms of mental health problems are heavily affected by things like depression or anxiety. The name depression is quite literal. It depresses many of your emotions and biological functions, like the desire to eat. However, some people are on the other end of the emotional spectrum. They will eat to cope with their emotions instead of engaging in healthier behaviors.

What to do? Your body is a machine, and like any machine, it needs fuel and maintenance to work in optimal condition. Mental health problems like depression and anxiety can cause a person's appetite to fluctuate wildly. The best way to self-manage this problem is to have at least one proper meal per day. It's incredibly difficult when you're depressed, but it is possible. On the other side of the coin is eating too much to cope with negative emotions. Again, you need to eat. But if you can limit yourself to normal serving sizes, you'll be far better off. Try to avoid junk food. If you're going to have some, pour it into a bowl instead of just eating on autopilot. Limit yourself to two slices of pizza or one reasonable plate of food.

10. Disrupted or excessive sleep.

Sleep is often disrupted in some way by mental health problems. That disruption often gets worse when your mental health starts to deteriorate. Many that suffer from depression may find themselves sleeping far too much or not enough. People with anxiety may be kept up at night from worrying too much, typically making things worse. And those with trauma may be plagued with nightmares that don't allow them to get restful sleep.

What to do? Sleep is a difficult symptom to self-manage. People with mental illness or trauma survivors will typically need medical help to get the sleep they need. However, you can do some things to help improve your sleep hygiene. Sleep hygiene, if you've never heard the term, is improving the circumstances which will allow you to get better sleep. Suggestions include not using your cellphone or screens before bed because they stimulate your brain. Stay away from coffee, energy drinks, chocolate, or other stimulants in the evening. Get yourself a comfortable mattress and pillows if possible. Cooler temperatures also facilitate healthier sleep.

11. Depleted or fluctuating energy levels.

As anyone with depression can tell you, energy levels can fluctuate hard. Sometimes you might feel fine and can easily conduct your life. Other times, not so much. You may feel exhausted, without energy, and unmotivated. On the flip side, you may feel like you have far too much energy, like you're going and just can't stop. You may have difficulty with multiple trains of thought to the point that it's distracting and can't focus.

What to do? This is another symptom that is difficult to self-manage. It can be caused by several things, from mental health troubles to physical illnesses. Anyone who's experienced these kinds of difficulties can tell you that there isn't much self-management to be done. The lows you just have to suffer through, reduce stress, and try to stay away from junk foods. You'll want to avoid coffee, sugared drinks, energy drinks, and other stimulants at the higher end. Try to get some adequate sleep in the process.

12. Unexplained physical symptoms.

Random things like aches and pains can result from mental health problems. Anxiety, trauma, depression, and many other problems can result in physical problems. Stress causes the body to create a hormone called cortisol which essentially prepares your body to deal with stressful situations in the short term. However, being under constant stress for long periods can keep your body flooded with cortisol which can cause physical issues like cardiovascular problems and a reduced immune system. You may find yourself constantly sick with the cold or flu. Do seek professional help when you can.

Parish Nursing has partnered with BayCare Behavioral Health and offers access to free and confidential services to our parishioners. For more information please reach out to your Nursing Ministry.

May Calendar!



5/4 - Election Meeting
(After Divine Liturgy)



Thank you to our Saint John's Community
for their generosity in supporting our
Palm Sunday Luncheon and Bake Sale.
A Special Thank You to our members that worked very hard
and made all our Holy Week events possible.



*It's time to join Philoptochos! [Click Here!](#)
We need you to be part of the
Army of Agape that is not only the right hand of the church,
but the friend and champion of the poor.
See Presvytera Denise for additional info.*

AHEPA SUNDAY 2025

Artoklasia on May 4th

The AHEPA Family of Tampa will celebrate National **AHEPA Day** on May 4th with an Artoklasia service.



The following passage describes the Artoklasia service and its meaning.

Artoklasia Service

The Artoklasia service is held at the end of the Liturgy. Five round loaves of bread are offered by individual faithful (in this case the AHEPA Family of Tampa) as a sign of devotion for personal or family anniversaries such as name days and other occasions (National AHEPA Day). The five loaves are reminiscent of the five loaves that Jesus Christ blessed in the desert by which five thousand of His bearers were fed. The Artoklasia also symbolizes and brings into practice the Agape meals of the very early Christian communities. Then, after the faithful received the Body and Blood of Christ, they would gather in a common meal, thus signifying the brotherly association established between them by their common faith and by their receiving the same sacramental Lord. Also, the Agape meals served as a charitable purpose by providing meals to the poorer from among them. As part of the service the priest prays for the members of the group that has provided the artos.

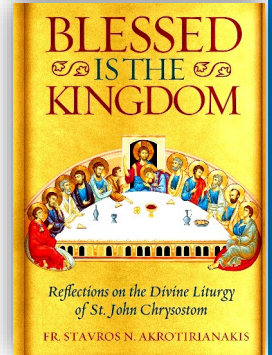
There will be rows of pews reserved for the AHEPA Family. You are all invited and encouraged to come forward and be seated in this area to be recognized as part of the AHEPA Family. Please join us to participate in this blessing.

ATTENTION --- **VETERANS/1ST RESPONDERS!**

All Veterans and First Responders are invited to our next meeting on Wednesday, **May 7th at 6:30 p.m. in the Church Hall.** We will discuss plans for remembering our veterans on Memorial Day weekend along with updates on ongoing topics. See everyone then!

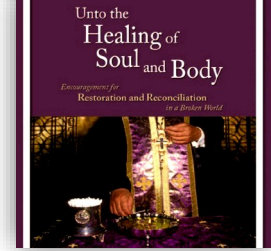
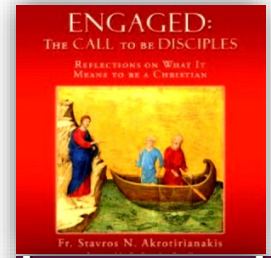
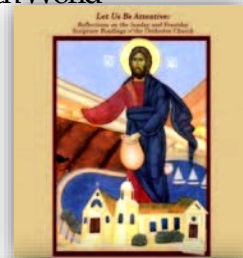
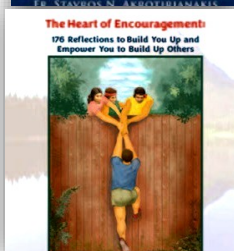
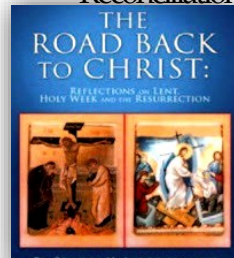
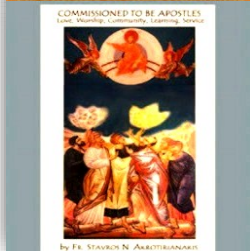
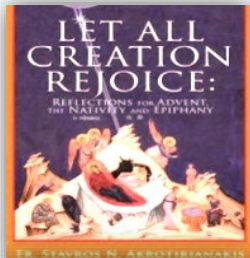
FR. STAVROS NEW BOOK

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



The word I selected is content! My reason for selecting this word for this is year is to remind me that God wants us to be content with the things we have and things he has given us. We all strive in our lives to do more and do better. We want more, but being content with what is in front of us is overlooked. As I've gotten older and hopefully wiser, I'm so content with things we take for granted! Waking up, walking better, feeling more energetic! It's important that we do things to better ourselves, however we should be happy with what we have too. Life is filled with ups and downs. Looking at accepting and understanding gives us more peace in our lives.

God bless everyone for a wonderful 2025!

For 10 years now, 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 topic of "**Arise & Build: Strengthening our hands for good work**" and on Saturday-Sunday, Father is writing on the Scripture passages of each Sunday. There are **5,096** people on the Prayer Team.

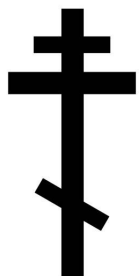


INTERESTED IN JOINING THE PRAYER TEAM?

Over 5,096 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 10 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, the family will be responsible for scooping the Kolyva in the kitchen after the Memorial Service to share with the entire community.
4. If the Philoptochos does the kolyva, there is a \$100 charge for this service-checks may be made payable to "St. John Philoptochos."
5. Also, please send the church office all of the names you wish to have commemorated at the memorial service, and how many pews, if any, you would like reserved for your family.

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



Have questions?

Just need to talk? Worried? Sad? Happy?

We are here for you!



Fr. Stavros
< 813-394-1038



Fr. John
678-637-4425>

OPT-IN ON THE MESSENGER

*In an effort to be more environmentally conscious, we will be mailing The Messenger **ONLY** to those who ask. If you wish to receive The Messenger by mail, you certainly may. We just ask that you indicate on your stewardship form, or let the office know, that you wish to receive The Messenger by mail. We will no longer be mailing The Messenger unless you ask us to.*

PHOTO GALLERY



~Sunday of the Holy Cross. March 23~



~Saturday of Lazarus ~



~Greek Independence Day Luncheon. March 30~



~Palm Sunday ~



*~Holy Monday
Evening~*





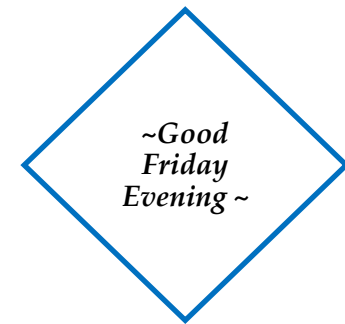
~Holy Tuesday Evening ~



*~Holy
Wednesday
Evening -
Holy Unction ~*



~Holy Thursday Evening ~



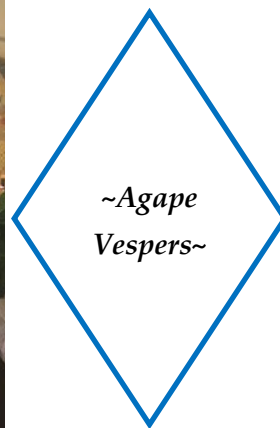


~Holy Saturday Morning 2025~



*~Holy Saturday
Resurrection
2025~*





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St. John the Baptist



Let's Get Connected for Our Latest News & Updates



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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 StJohnGOC Tampa.

We Are Live

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

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



Beware of Emails or Text Messages Asking for Gift Cards



This is a common and very scary thing that is happening. People who are impersonating as Fr. Stavros have been emailing people and asking them to buy gift cards, scratch off the back to reveal the code, take pictures of the code and email them the pictures. Fr. Stavros would never under any circumstances ask for a gift card via email. If you receive an email like this, please call Fr. Stavros immediately. Many people these days are falling victim to scams like these. Please double check and even triple check any emails or phone calls that ask for money even if it looks real.

Any questions? Please contact the office.

WELCOME TO OUR PARISH

If you are new to the Tampa Bay area or just visiting, we would love to get to know you better.

PLEASE TEXT THE WORD

"WELCOME" TO 813-790-5950

FOLLOW THE PROMPTS TO GIVE US
YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION AND FROM THERE
YOU WILL BE DIRECTED TO OUR ONLINE CONNECTION CARD

DO NOT NEGLECT TO SHOW *hospitality* TO STRANGERS.
FOR THEREBY SOME HAVE ENTERTAINED *angels unaware.*
HEBREWS 13:2

Youth Protection Program



GREEK ORTHODOX
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA



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

If you are interested and would like to get started or if you have questions, please contact Suzanne Pileggi at smpileggi1@gmail.com 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:

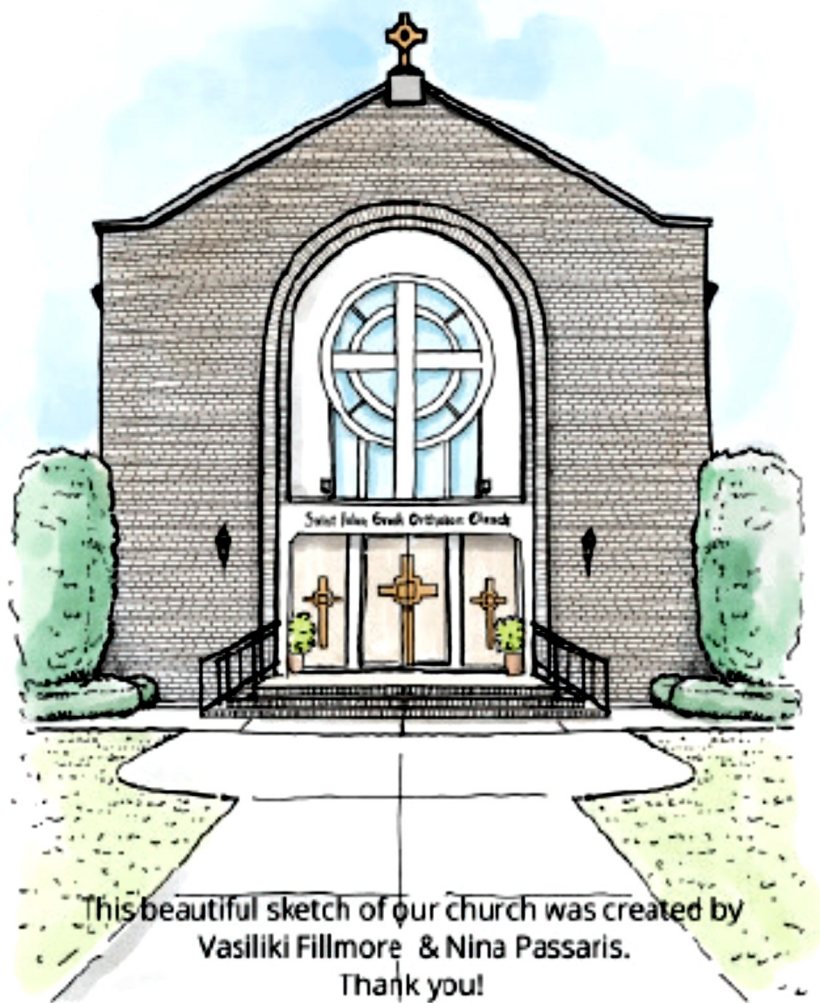
_____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ \$200 _____ Other

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

May 2025					
◀ April 2025					June 2025 ▶
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
**Fast Day				1 Orthodoxy 201 Class 6:30-8:00p.m.	2 ** Tweens Movie night
					3 Adult Greek School Children's Greek School
4 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Philoptochos Meeting (elections) Men's Group 5:00p.m.	5 <u>St. Irene</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	6 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	7 ** Choir 7:15 p.m.	8 <u>St. John the Theologian</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	9 **
				Orthodoxy 201 Class 6:30-8:00p.m.	
11 <u>Mother's Day</u> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	12	13 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	14 ** <u>Mid-Pentecost</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Choir 7:15 p.m.	15 <u>Fr. Stavros</u> <u>Anniversary of Ordination</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Young Adult Discussion 7:00-9:00p.m.	16 **
18 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Youth Sunday Last Day Sunday school End of year party	19	20 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	21 ** <u>Sts. Constantine and Helen</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis 6:00p.m. Choir 7:15 p.m.	22 Orthodoxy 201 Class 6:30-8:00p.m.	23 ** Ahepa College Scholarship Awards & Dinner 5-8:30
25 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	26 <u>Memorial Day</u> Office Closed	27 <u>Leave-Taking of Pascha</u> Women's Bible Study 10:00a.m. Orthros 5:00 p.m. Liturgy 6:00 p.m.	28 Choir 7:15 p.m.	29 <u>Ascension</u> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Orthodoxy 201 Class 6:30-8:00p.m.	30 **
					31 Adult Greek School

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX
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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*