



ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

— THE MESSENGER —

August 2025



<<THE DORMITION OF OUR MOST HOLY LADY THE THEOTOKOS AND EVER VIRGIN MARY>>
August 15

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.

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Buildings & Grounds

Tony Magos 813-957-3206

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Tara Swartzbaugh, Director 813-313-0439
Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782
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Greg Melton 813-967-2074

Connect Through Christ - Special Needs Ministry for Children

Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534

Dance Groups

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Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963
IIAPEA, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136
IIANHIFYPI, 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

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Photography Ministry

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Philoptochos

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Young Adult

Aris Rogers 813-309-5525

Young at Heart

Dora Morgan 813-613-3738

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Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855

12 Disciples

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRIEST

~My Soul _____ the Lord, and my spirit _____ in
God my Savior.~

On **August 15**, we celebrate the feast of the Dormition (Assumption, Falling Asleep) of the Virgin Mary. Some background on the Virgin Mary. She was born to elderly parents, Joachim and Anna. (We commemorate her conception on **December 9**. We celebrate her nativity on **September 8**) She was raised in the temple from age 3-13. (We celebrate her entrance into the temple on **November 21**) During her time in the Temple, her parents both died. When she came out of the temple, she was betrothed to Joseph, an elderly man. Shortly thereafter, she was visited by the Archangel Gabriel and told that she would bear in her womb, the Son of God. (We commemorate the Annunciation on **March 25**)

The Virgin Mary is an integral part to God's plan for the salvation of the world. In order to redeem the world from sin and death, God decided to incarnate His only-begotten Son (*the Word*), so that He would take flesh and enter into the world as a human being. Jesus Christ would enter the world as a baby, with an earthly mother and a hometown, the way we all do. When we meet someone new, within the first minute, we ask where they are from. Thus, Jesus Christ would have a family and a hometown, just like other people. His conception would be by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, in that way He is different than all of us. God entrusted the role of bearing the Son of God to the Virgin Mary, who was visited by the Archangel Gabriel when she was about 14 and told that she had been chosen by God for this awesome task. Her answer was *"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."* (**Luke 1:38**)

The Virgin Mary had a cousin named Elizabeth. Elizabeth was considerably older than Mary, and like Mary's parents, Elizabeth and her husband Zacharias also did not have children. Zacharias was also visited by the Archangel Gabriel and told that he and Elizabeth would conceive in their old age and that their son would be the *"forerunner,"* the one that would announce the arrival of the Christ to the world. Their son is John the Baptist, and thus Jesus and John the Baptist were cousins.

In **Luke 1:39-56**, we read that the Virgin Mary visited Elizabeth while both were pregnant. We don't know if Mary had communicated with Elizabeth before the visit that she was pregnant, or if she told Elizabeth that the baby Mary was carrying was the Son of God. What we know is that when *"Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb."* (**Luke 1:41**) Indeed, John the Baptist, still in his mother's womb, was already

assuming his role, recognizing the baby in the womb of Mary as the Son of God. Elizabeth, whether she has been told by Mary or inspired by the Holy Spirit, recognizes what is going on and exclaims to Mary with a loud cry: *"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!*

And is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (**Luke 1:42-43**) Elizabeth recognizes Mary as the *"mother of my Lord."* In some ways, Elizabeth is the first one to proclaim Mary's child as the Lord, the promised Messiah. Imagine the faith and inspiration of Elizabeth!



Mary's response is a hymn of praise, which we still sing at most Orthros services throughout the year (called both in Scripture and in liturgical texts, the *"Magnificat"* based on the word *"magnify"* which is at the beginning of the hymn, in fact in Greek, *"megalini"* leads off the hymn):

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my Spirit rejoices in
God my Savior,*

*For He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden.
For behold, henceforth all generations will called me
blessed;*

*For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and
holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear
Him from generation to generation.*

*He has shown strength with His arm, He has scattered
the proud in the imagination of their hearts,*

*He has put down the mighty from their thrones and
exalted those of low degree; He has filled the hungry with
good things, and the rich He has sent empty away.*

*He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His
mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to
His posterity forever. **Luke 1:46-55***

Let us focus on the first verse of this hymn: *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.* At summer camp last month, during staff training, I asked the staff to write the words *"My soul"* on the top line of a blank notecard and *"the Lord"* on the bottom line. And then I asked them to fill in the blank. After each card was filled out, the cards were collected and redistributed, so more than likely, no one had their own card. And then I asked them to share the answers on their cards. In a space where the answers were anonymous, they didn't hold back from being honest. Some answers included:

My soul *has lost sight of* the Lord.
My soul *feels guilty and ashamed before* the Lord.
My soul *needs a new start with* the Lord.
My soul *has questions for* the Lord.
My soul *doubts* the Lord.

They weren't all like this. There were several that had positive answers, like:

My soul *loves* the Lord.
My soul *enjoys praying to* the Lord.
My soul *is grateful to* the Lord.

I would like to pose the same question to you that I did to them: How do you fill in the blank:
My Soul _____ the Lord.

If your answer is not one of the positive ones, there is no need to worry. If we are all honest, we're probably all on one of those less than positive ones at times in life. There are many wonderful things about being an Orthodox Christian, but here are two of the most comforting. First, anytime you feel like you want to make a new start, you can simply make one. If you haven't prayed in a while, pray today, just do it. If you haven't read the Bible in a while, or ever, just pick it up and start reading. (Start with the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). If you haven't been to church in a while, just go this Sunday. It's very easy to make a new start—any moment of any day is a great time to make a new start. Second, if you feel guilty and ashamed before the Lord and you can't seem to kick that feeling, make an appointment for confession with Fr. John or me. It's actually not only easy, but cathartic to empty the shame of your soul in front of Christ, and hear words of encouragement through the prayer of absolution: *Have no further anxiety about the things you have confessed; depart in peace. The Grace of the Holy Spirit has loosed and forgiven your sins.* We are not here to judge. We don't think less of people. We don't remember what people say.

Questions for the Lord are good. Ask me or Fr. John any question. Come to the Orthodoxy 101 class in September or the Orthodoxy 201 class that is ongoing. Go to a Bible study. Questions are always welcome. Doubts are part of even the best part of life. On a tough day, who hasn't doubted the decision to get married, or have children, or work in one's current job. Who hasn't questioned their own judgment in making a decision. So if you have doubts about God, that's okay. In life when we have doubts, we don't just end a marriage, rid ourselves of children or quit working. We work through it, we keep showing up, we get some easy wins, and we regain confidence. It's the same thing in the Christian life—keep showing up, work

through it (and let us help you), get some easy wins and regain confidence.

There is no shame if you fill in the blank "*My soul _____ the Lord*" with something negative. The shame is if you don't do anything about that.

The staff at camp were not asked to continue the verse: *and my spirit _____ in God my Savior*. But let's continue this exercise, and ask, how would you fill in that part of the verse? One cannot very well "rejoice" in God if one's soul has lost sight of Him, or feels guilty before Him, or doubts Him, etc. If your answer in this blank isn't "rejoicing," could it be "investing"?

How about this statement—*My soul questions the Lord and my spirit is investing in God my Savior*—in other words, even though my soul is questioning the Lord, I am investing time in getting my questions answered so that I can approach the Lord with more confidence.

What if your statement reads like this—*My soul is ashamed before the Lord and my spirit is working toward repentance before God my Savior*—that's a good statement, because we're not stuck in shame but rather working towards repentance, which will result in removal of shame.

The statement, *My soul _____ the Lord and my spirit _____ in God my Savior* is an important statement to meditate on often, and as we go through life, our answers will undoubtedly change.

To magnify is to make something appear greater
Mary said "*My soul MAGNIFIES the Lord.*" Let's look at the word "magnify" for a moment. To "magnify" means to make something appear greater. A magnifying glass is a lens which when held over an object, makes that object bigger. A magnifying glass allows us to see something in more detail than we would see it with just our eyes. A text, for instance, that is hard to read, would literally jump off the page with clarity if a magnifying glass was held over it.

In saying "*My soul magnifies the Lord,*" Mary was saying that her soul would make the Lord come alive with clarity, that she would humbly make the Lord known in a large way through her life, and that people would see the Lord magnified in her. However, she would not see this as a burden, to magnify Christ. Her reaction to this sacred task would be joy, she said "*my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*" Her spirit did not feel especially burdened by this task (we know that the words of St. Simeon, "*a sword will pierce through your own soul also,*" **Luke 2:35**, so it certainly was burdened at times) but at

the moment she offered this hymn, her soul was filled with joy. (*We celebrate the Presentation of Christ in the temple by the Virgin Mary on February 2*)

Theotokos

One of the titles of the Virgin Mary is “Theotokos,” which literally means “God-bearer.” In the Greek language, masculine nouns often end with “os” and are preceded by the masculine article “o.” Female nouns have the article “I” and a female ending like “I” or “a.” The word “Theotokos” when it appears in Greek, has a feminine article with a masculine ending, the only such word that exists in the Greek language. And that is because the call to be “Theotokos” is for everyone. And how do we become a Theotokos? St. Cyril of Alexandria has a beautiful quote about receiving Holy Communion, the very act of becoming “Theotokos”:

He who receives Communion is made holy and divinized in soul and body in the same way that water, set over a fire, becomes boiling. . . Communion works like yeast that has been mixed into dough so that it leavens the whole mass; . . . Just as by melting two candles together you get one piece of wax, so, I think, one who received the Flesh and Blood of Jesus is fused together with Him by this Communion, and the soul finds that he is in Christ and Christ in him.

Holy Communion strengthens the bond between us and Christ, it keeps the heart warm, it keeps the soul boiling. We’ve all had the experience of having food get cold while we are eating it, either because it is too much to eat or we are eating it too slowly, and so we pop the food into the microwave for a minute, and the food comes back hot and tasty. Similarly, the temptations and distractions of the world can cause our spiritual fervor to cool, and Holy Communion, in the context of the Divine Liturgy, is the warmup for our souls to be joyful and ready to magnify the Lord.

A mother plays (at least) five roles in our lives. First, a mother is a nurturer—from even before our births, our mothers nurtured us and protected us in the womb. This role continues all the way through life, no matter how old we get. It is not unusual for adult children to go to their mothers for guidance and help. Second, a mother is a comforter. Most children, when they don’t feel well, go first to their mothers. It is our mother who generally comforts and reassures us when don’t feel well, assuring us that things will get better. Third, a mother is a director when we are young. She is the one who does a lot of the driving, shopping, cooking, helping, cajoling, and all the things we need to grow from a child to an adult. Fourth, when we are young adults, the role of our mother shifts from director to consultant. While we may not have our

mom living in the same place as us—think college

dorm, apartment, first home—we still call on our mothers for advice, and also eagerly return home for a meal, or because mom does the laundry better than us. While mom doesn’t necessarily solve our problems, we readily run to her for intercession, for advice on how to deal with whatever it is we are dealing with. And fifth, a mother ultimately is hopefully seen as a friend, someone we want to hang out with, someone who we joyfully talk about life with. (*Dad’s play most of these roles as well, but for this month, the analogy is of the Virgin Mary as a mother figure.*)

The Virgin Mary is supposed to play these same roles in our lives as well, as she is the mother of all of us in a spiritual way. She is a nurturer—she prays for us and intercedes for us at the throne of Christ, her Son. She is a comforter—in times of sorrow or distress, we run to her for intercession, prayer, guidance and healing, together with the angels and the saints. In fact, the Paraklesis service, a service of supplication to the Virgin Mary, that we will celebrate in August (*and once a month throughout the year*) is a service of supplication to the Virgin Mary, specifically to be offered in times of sorrow and distress. The Virgin Mary is our director, if we allow her. Her examples of purity, obedience, service, sacrifice and faith are lessons for each of us in so many of life’s circumstances. She is our consultant, again if we let her. Imagine how life could be if we consulted the standards of the Virgin Mary and let those help to set our standards. And finally, she is a friend. If we call the Lord a “philanthropos,” a friend of man, then certainly we can ascribe the same idea to the Virgin Mary. She was like us, thus she understands us.

Mary’s song of praise, “*My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior*” hopefully becomes our song of praise as well, not only expressed in words but in actions. Hopefully we can come to the place where Mary was when she sang this song, and even more important, to the same place she was when she surrendered and said, “*Behold I am the handmaiden/servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.*” May the Lord, through the intercessions of the Virgin Mary, continue to inspire our souls to magnify Him, our spirits to rejoice in Him, and for us to become a Theotokos, a bearer of Him, as well!

Have a blessed Dormition fast in anticipation of the Feast of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary!

+Fr. Stavros



A MESSAGE FROM OUR MINISTRY COORDINATOR

⁴Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! ⁵Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody! Psalm 98:4-5 (ESV)

This month begins a year-long series that will look at different Communion hymns that are sung throughout the year. Each month will highlight a seasonal hymn based on a feast of the month. During the Divine Liturgy, as we draw near to the highlight of receiving the Holy Eucharist, the priest prompts us to pay attention, as he will be preparing Holy Communion before us. He says, "The holy gifts are for the holy people of God." As he concludes this, the people then sing a short hymn of praise, "One is Holy One is Lord, Jesus Christ. To the glory of God the Father, Amen." Then the prayers for Holy Communion are recited by the clergy as the congregation says them quietly to themselves. While the priest is preparing the Holy Communion, the people then sing one of several communion hymns, depending on the season, or if the Divine Liturgy is being celebrated on a Sunday. One thing these hymns have in common is that with the exception of the Paschal hymn, they are all verses taken from one of the Psalms.

This month of August, we will begin this series with the hymn that is sung for the feasts of the Virgin Mary, "**I will receive the cup of salvation.**" It is one of the few hymns sung in the first person and is taken from a psalm of King David, as he expressed his gratitude and devotion to God for deliverance from distress.

Psalm 115/6 (ESV) —I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.² Because He inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. ³The snares of death encompassed me; the

*pangs of Shaol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. ⁴Then I called on the name of the Lord: "O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!" ⁵Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful. ⁶The Lord preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. ⁷Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. ⁸For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling; ⁹I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living. ¹⁰I believed, even when I spoke: "I am greatly afflicted"; ¹¹I said in my alarm, "All mankind are liars." ¹²What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? ¹³**I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord,** ¹⁴I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people. ¹⁵Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. ¹⁶O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant. You have loosed my bonds. ¹⁷I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord. ¹⁸I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people, ¹⁹in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!*

The preeminent feast of the Virgin Mary is the Dormition, or the falling asleep, celebrated on **August 15th**. There are several other important feast days for her, including her nativity on September 8, her Presentation in the temple on November 21, the Presentation of Christ in the Temple on February 2, and the Annunciation on March 25. In addition to the feast days of the Virgin Mary, this hymn is also sung at weddings when the couple drinks from the common cup and at baptisms when the newly baptized receives Holy Communion for the first time. In fact both the wedding and the baptism used to be done in the context of the Divine Liturgy. They were later taken

out of the Liturgy and celebrated on their own, explaining how this Communion Hymn finds itself in both sacraments.

While verse 13 is the only one emphasized in the Communion hymn, the preceding verse poses an important question: *"What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?"* That's a heavy question to ask oneself. And David sought the answer by using a reference and a foreshadowing that meant as much to the ancient Israelites as it does to the modern Christian.

Lifting a cup was a common practice in ancient Israel, often accompanying a drink offering to God. The "cup of salvation" represents the blessings and deliverance received from God, which would also prompt a public declaration of gratitude. It is a symbolic gesture of the drink offerings in the Old Testament, especially the Passover meal, where a cup is lifted in remembrance of God's saving power.

The phrase also connects us to the Last Supper, where Jesus used the cup to symbolize the new covenant through His sacrifice. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus speaks of the cup as the new covenant in His blood and our ultimate salvation through His sacrifice.

Calling on the name of the Lord is a recurring theme in the Psalms and throughout Scripture, signifying prayer, worship, and reliance on God. This phrase emphasizes the personal relationship between the believer and God, highlighting trust and dependence on His character and promises. It reflects a posture of humility and faith, recognizing God's sovereignty and willingness to save. This act of calling on the Lord is also prophetic, pointing to the New Testament teaching that salvation is found in no one else, as St. Paul wrote in the book of Romans for "everyone who calls on the

name of the Lord will be saved." (**Romans 10:13**)

When you attend a Divine Liturgy for a feast day of the Virgin Mary, or even a baptism or wedding, and you hear this particular communion hymn, pay attention to the mood and tone of the hymn in which it is sung. Allow it to evoke the imagery intended by David, remembering the hopes of the ancient people, and the fulfillment of those hopes in Jesus Christ for us. We sing this hymn, reminding us that God our Father chose the vessel of the Theotokos to bring salvation into the world.

May the Panagia intercede to her Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for us all as we honor her falling asleep on August 15th.

Maria



ARISE & BUILD



*"Let us arise and build!" So they strengthened their hands for the good work.
Nehemiah 2:18*

As we finish up the summer months of 2025, the **Arise & Build** campaign continues in full swing. The success the campaign has enjoyed so far and the progress that has been made in the last few months on the commencement of Phase 1 to renovate and expand our church and other facilities at St. John is solely due to the Grace of Christ, who inspires the hard work, focus, perseverance, expertise and dedication of Father Stavros, our **Arise & Build** team and of those who have contributed to our campaign so far.



Before providing a brief update on where we are with everything, as we have discussed over the last few weeks with our Ministry Leaders in small group lunches and dinners, we need to

take a step back to focus on the "Why?" of this once in a generation project for our community. Why are we so focused? Why have we worked so hard? Why do we have a dedicated team of skilled volunteers working on this? Why should YOU support this campaign? The following excerpt by Daniel Hilty from the Lewis Center for Leadership, provides a great message to all of us:

"Probably the most important task was reminding the congregation of the 'why' behind all of the changes. We all needed to be reminded from time to time that the changes were not for us; they were for people not yet present. They were for neighbors who are hungry for God today, and for children and grandchildren who are still to come. Once or twice during the renovation process we looked at old photographs of the generations who sacrificed and worked hard so that the church could be here for us today..."

During our recent small group meetings, we circulated a black and white picture from the early 1960s of a group of men and the parish priest of St. John standing in an open field directly behind the altar of our church, breaking ground on what was to be the first St. John Day School building and

what eventually became the charter school and church Administration building, which was completed and opened in the late 1960s. Only a few of the men in the picture have been identified, which distinctly illustrates that those parishioners and their families spent that time, effort and funding to build something "for people not yet present....for children and grandchildren who are still to come."



Continuing the excerpt from Mr. Hilty:

"...and we imagined ourselves in the same role: as those that future generations are counting on to sacrifice and work hard so that there will be a church for them."

As I focused in my remarks to the congregation in late February when we officially kicked off the general phase of the **Arise & Build** campaign, **"IT'S TIME!"** It's time to step into the shoes of the previous generation, to sacrifice and work hard so there will be:

- An expanded church sanctuary to accommodate the current and growing overflow of parishioners who attend services each week and better serve them with an actual narthex, restroom, storage, upgraded electrical and audio/visual systems, and expanded parking;
- A renovated Ministry Building fully focused (every day and not just on weekends) on supporting all of our current ministries, new ministries yet to come, our Sunday School, Greek School, church offices, the surrounding community, and much more;
- A renovated Kourmolis Center to host larger gatherings of our parish, an expanded food pantry, an expanded Orthodox bookstore, a renovated kitchen and updated bathrooms for our church and our Festival;
- An outdoor pavilion that our kids, grandkids and even adventurous adults can utilize any time; and

- An intimate prayer garden to provide a respite for any one of us to have a brief, serene and peaceful escape in times we may need that isolated moment with God.

All these things and more will greatly improve our facilities, God's House, and have us prepared to accommodate and serve those *"not yet present....for children and grandchildren who are still to come."*



PHASE 1 IS FINALLY UNDERWAY:

- The charter school tenant's lease ended on June 30th, and they are completely moved into their new home a few miles away.
- The church was able to utilize a lot of furniture and other items the school left behind to outfit temporary Sunday School rooms in the Administration Building until the Ministry Building has been completed.
- Parishioners were invited to the library to look through the almost 10,000 library books the school left behind and keep as many as they wanted before the remainder were donated to a local charity.
- A junk removal company has emptied the remaining contents out of the building in preparation for the renovations to start.
- Architectural construction drawings for the Ministry Building renovation are being finalized to apply for the necessary permits within the month.
- Final bids from several experienced general contractors are being evaluated by the Arise & Build Committee for recommendation to the Parish Council so that a contract can be signed and the renovations can begin.
- General contractors are also reviewing the planned church expansion so that Phase 2 of the project can begin, targeting the timeframe right after Pascha in 2026.

This and much more is underway, and I encourage you to ask me, Father Stavros or anyone on the **Arise & Build** Committee any questions you may have. You will continue to see updates on construction and capital raising progress in the weekly bulletin and Weekly Update emails from the church, monthly **Arise & Build** newsletters, periodic Constant Contact emails, and a comprehensive quarterly progress report, the first edition of which will be delivered to the parish in the next few weeks.

On the capital raising front, in just over 10 months

and as of July 15th, exactly 200 donors have pledged over \$5.5 million to the **Arise & Build** campaign. A huge and continued THANK YOU to those who have made this sacrificial pledge, bringing us to over 71% of our goal of \$7.8 million. Of the amount pledged, we have collected over \$1.5 million, which is deposited in our dedicated **Arise & Build** bank account. The success we have experienced so far has allowed the Finance Committee and Parish Council to approve the commencement of Phase 1, which is the renovation of the Ministry Building, and which as I noted above, is progressing as planned.

While we have had generous pledges from 200 donors, only 145 of those donors are current Stewards of St. John. We presently have 391 church stewards, which means that only 37% of our existing Stewards have made a pledge. Reaching 100% our targeted financial goal is obviously important, however **we are much more focused on achieving 100% participation from ALL of our Stewards, regardless of the amount that is pledged.** If you have not made a pledge yet to the campaign, please ask yourself "Why?" Go back to the beginning of this article to remind yourself of our parish's "Why?" for this project. We want you to be a part of that! We all should want to look back once all the phases of this project have been completed, and be able to say to our current and future grandchildren, "I was a part of that, for you!"

Our Lord said in **Matthew 13:31-32**, *"The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it is grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."*

Every pledge that has been received so far, big and small, is like that mustard seed. The amount you can sacrifice, may seem small to you, but with God, it will grow so *"neighbors who are hungry for God today and for children and grandchildren yet to come"* will make their spiritual "nests" in the "branches" of our Christ-centered community of St. John. Join us!



Mike Xenick

Arise & Build Campaign Chairman

ST. STEPHEN'S SUMMER CAMP TESTIMONIALS

Kaitlin Zelatis, first year counselor, St. Helen

St. Stephen's is truly an amazing place that has had a huge impact on me both when I was a camper and now as a counselor. As a camper in previous years I always enjoyed sitting by the lake for alone with God and singing in the services. This year, as a first time counselor to the youngest girls I found that my favorite part of camp was helping to guide my girls to strengthen their relationships with God and each other. The memories I have made and the lessons I've learned through activities like the ropes course are ones that I will always cherish. I still have friends from my very first year of camp and my relationship with God has grown so much. I would highly recommend that anyone on the fence about going to camp to give it a try, it really is an unforgettable experience.

Eliana Edquid, 1st year camper, St. Helen, going into 8th grade

If I could describe St. Stephen's camp in one word, it would be fun. But that makes it sound like an understatement. If I could add two words in front of 'fun', it would be so much fun. But then again, understatement. As a first-year camper, I came to camp a little nervous, not scared, nervous. I had my two best friends, Caroline and Julie, and recommendations from my cousin(s) and friends, as a starting point for entering camp. I expected camp to be mostly surrounded by religious principles, but it turns out that it was just a whole bucket of fun. I made so many new friends along the east coast and experienced many new things. If there was a better, more intense word instead of 'fun' then I would use it to describe my camp experience.

Now, to get into the reasons why I enjoyed St. Stephens so much. Something I liked about camp was the community aspect of it. Churches around the east coast came together at this camp. I made many new friends from Georgia, Tennessee, from Sarasota, FL, and Alabama. I also liked how all the counselors were so friendly and really made camp such an included place as a vacation from the stress in life. Something I remember is the fun night activities we would have. Whether it was Western Night or change-of-plans-rain-in Greek Night, or even the Friday Olympics, I loved it. I made so many memories battling the other cabins in Clash of the Cabins (where we did an all-girls win sweep not to brag) and came in 3rd. Okay, to be honest, coming into camp I had a nasty pet peeve about venerating icons. But during camp, something I learned, was that the icon is God's image, it's his representation of what he looks like, and now, I would gladly venerate an icon. What I learned from St. Stephen's is the whole camp is runs on trust. The ropes course, trust. The bunk rooms, trust. Church, trust. I've learned to trust others, even more than I already have. Trust the people



guiding you during the blindfolded trust walk. Trust people in the bunk rooms not to take your stuff. And trust God that He is going to make sure that you are safe and having fun at camp. Now I'm going to share one memory that shows my enjoyment at camp. On Friday, during the camp-wide cleanup, which was the same day as the Olympics (where we run around and get super sandy and super wet) my cabin and the St. Kathrine cabin all led Father Stavros and Mia (his second-in-command) on an Encouragement Walk. An Encouragement Walk is where Father Stavros and Mia (in this example) are blindfolded, and we would lead them around and tell them why we are grateful for them, and what we like about them. After that, both cabins circled around Father and Mia while they took off their blindfolds. Mia had to take her hat off to do so, and when she did, a handful of sand came out of her hat. Me and my friends were laughing so hard. Especially when we saw the amount of sand in her hair. Everyone was laughing all together at the sight. Now, that I recall this memory, I realize that it's not just this memory that made camp so memorable, but it was St. Stephen's as a whole. Thank you so much, Father and Mia for making camp the best week of my life. And I thank my counselors Elena, Toula, and Kaitlyn for all the dance parties we threw.

Caroline Anton, 1st year camper, St. Helen Cabin, going into 8th grade

St. Stephen's was my first sleep away camp and I had a blast. Not only did I make new friends, but I got to go with my cousin Zachary. Camp made me get closer to him and I connected really well with the people there. My favorite part of camp was the lake. We put a mat in the water to jump on! During the wide camp swim, Eliana and I did flips off the dock. I also loved the night time activities like the sing-along and the Western Bandit night. I got to bond with my cabin. We also had the Olympics and the dance on Friday night. I had a fantastic time. I can't wait to go back. I love St. Stephen's and I will be counting down the days until next year!

Nick Staviski, 1st time counselor, St. Luke Cabin

My name is Nick I moved to Tampa 2 months ago from Texas, so first off thank y'all for making me feel welcome. But just wanted to share my 2 takeaways from camp: peaceful the environment & kind of the perfect atmosphere for connecting with my faith ;

First peaceful. I have this very distinct image of the chapel. If y'all haven't seen it it rivals any church I've ever seen but it's beautiful right across the lake. And on Thursday morning after alone time with god I saw father Stav go down there and I have this beautiful picture of him kneeling to pray in front of the lakes reflection that really stuck with me.

Second. Got the advice after confession to look to pray to the saints. I get really distracted during church and periodically would take breaks. So during

the Wednesday vespers I tried praying to Saint Steven and I don't want to say there was a miracle but I definitely felt a presence behind me felt like praying with me and telling me to pay attention. So for one of the few services I paid attention to the homily beautiful about admiring God's creation. So as we are walking to dinner one kid wandered off he was looking at this peach and I'm like hey those aren't ripe a little annoyed he was wandering off from group. And he's like I know I'm just admiring God's creation. And I was like wow he gets it. He got the homily and internalized it!

Kenny Kane, fifth year camper, St. Mark Cabin, going into 11th grade

I really enjoyed camp this year it was a great experience. I spent a lot of time forming new friendships and rekindling old relationships from years ago. It was super helpful and rewarding coming closer to God. While simultaneously having a great deal of fun with my cabin mates.

Philip Kane, fifth year camper, St. Nicholas Cabin, going into 9th grade

This year at St. Stephen's Summer camp I had an amazing time. Whether it was through meeting up with old friends or making new ones, every year at St. Stephen's keeps getting better. Every time I go I always feel hesitant to arrive, but once I'm there, a week of great fun and spirituality begins. I recommend camp to everyone who is able to go. It is truly a highlight of my year.

Artemis Xenick, Fourth Year Counselor, St. Euphemia Cabin

Going to St. Stephen's is such a great gift every year. It is so refreshing to be in a bubble of pure fun, disconnecting from the world, and being surrounded by amazing people who share the same faith. I've been to St. Stephen's six times as a camper, and this was my fourth year attending as a counselor.

I was a counselor for the oldest girl's cabin, and it was such a privilege to get to see the girls grow and encourage each other throughout the week. Seeing this group of girls grow together in teamwork was awesome to watch. Beyond our campers, the staff for this week of camp was truly incredible. From our staff training, we were all open and vulnerable with each other, and there was a deep sense of trust from the beginning. I felt consistently supported and loved by the staff members, and it was a great joy to connect with each of them.

I want to say a huge thank you to Father Stavros. He does so much for this camp, the staff, and the campers. He is not only a great leader but is someone



who we can all trust to guide us. Thank you, Father!
I am so grateful for this week at St. Stephen's; the incredible memories, spiritual reset, and amazing camp family that I got to spend the week with has filled my heart to the brim. God is good!

Victoria Magos-3rd year camper, St. Katherine Cabin, going into 10th grade

St. Stephen's camp is always the highlight of my summer. When I think of St. Stephens, I think of endless fun, smiles, and memories I'll carry with me for the rest of my life. One thing about St. Stephens I absolutely love is the people there. Everyone at St. Stephens is so welcoming and friendly, and you quickly grow a great friendship. I remember all the laughs and memories I shared with all my friends at St. Stephens. Most importantly, my bond with God grows stronger and stronger every time I go to St. Stephens and I learn so much about our faith and how beautiful it is. I cannot wait to go back to St. Stephens next year!

Toula Trakas-1st year counselor-St. Helen Cabin

This was my 6th year going to St. Stephen's and my first year going as a counselor. I had always wanted to go back to camp as a counselor and was so excited to get to do that this year! I had St. Helen, the youngest girls cabin, and they were just the sweetest campers ever. I loved watching them experience camp for the first time- making new friends, trying new things, and having so much fun. It was really great to see the camp that I've been to for so many years from their perspective. I also really enjoyed being on the other side of camp and getting to see behind the scenes. St. Stephen's is such a well oiled machine and I loved having a part in it! Thank you to Father Stavros and Mia for such a great week!!

Niko Gonatos-1st year counselor-St. Nicholas Cabin

My name is Niko Gonatos, and I have gone to St. Stephen's Summer Camp for several years. I went as a camper for 3 years prior to COVID, then took a few years off, and returned this year as a counselor for the youngest boy's cabin (St. Nicholas). I also served as one of the music counselors, teaching camp songs and church hymns to all the campers and leading the campers at the chant stand for services. I enjoyed my time at camp developing relationships with the campers and counselors and growing closer to God

through daily services and spiritual enrichment in our Orthodox Life sessions. My favorite memory of camp was the camp sing along, where the whole camp sang all the camp songs with such passion and enthusiasm. I enjoyed accompanying them with Artemis and seeing them find so much joy in their singing. I am grateful to Fr. Stav for providing me with this opportunity to impact our youth in this way and for leading such a great camp week at St. Stephens.

Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis-Camp Director-
Week Two-41st Week of directing camp

Years ago, at staff training, when I asked our staff members why they came to camp, one person said "to detox from life." That has always stuck with me. Life is so busy, there is so much noise, we are so distracted, and despite having phones that connect us to so much information, we are by and large disconnected from people, and one of the results of all of this is that our relationships – with others, with ourselves, and with God – are weakened. Because of this, our level of "toxicity" rises and our level of contentment and joy plummets. One of the reasons I look forward to camp is actually to be away from the phone, to take time away from the "noise" that comes with it, and to reconnect with natural beauty that can't be found in Tampa.

During the evening of our staff training day, we went on a silent walk. Everyone committed to not talking for 30 minutes, which itself was amazing. When is the last time you went thirty minutes without talking, or without hearing anyone else talk. A lot of our walk was on grass, so there wasn't the sound of feet walking on rocks. Periodically, we would all stop, cut off flashlights and just stand still. There was no moon on this night, but there were bright stars. There were sounds of nature, and for a few seconds here and there, even they were quiet, and there was total silence and stillness. And that was actually amazing. I could never experience anything like that in Tampa. Even a sunset at the beach is never silent, there are always other people around. It really helps me reconnect with God standing under stars and realizing that He put each one of them up there.

There are other amazing things that happen at camp. First, there is a schedule that includes two short worship services each day, and 20 minute of alone time with God, where people sit quietly with their thoughts and can pray or reflect on things. I start each day well before the campers wake up by hearing confessions from the staff. I've known most of the staff for years and many of them want to sit down with me for an hour during the week, and so we do that early in the morning. We sit by the lake, and while I listen and counsel, I also get to see the sunrise each day, another beautiful experience. Several priests volunteer their time, and over the course of the week, we get to hear sermons from each of them, confirming the universality of our faith – they all deliver the same message in a slightly

different way, matching the personality of each. I got to work with 21 young adults, many of them in college, and it is awesome to be able to work with young people, to trust them, to lean on them to make the week successful. It is amazing to see their creativity and joy. And even more beautiful is seeing the first time counselors, who have been campers for years, people who have been on the receiving end of camp, to now be on the leadership side and doing this. This helps restore optimism in our young people, and helps me see the potential of them becoming leaders in the church. Of course, it is also sobering to hear how these same staff people are struggling to stay in the church and connected to God in their college years. For some of them, this is their only connection with God and the faith during the year. Some of them are at higher risk from leaving the church than the campers. After our staff training mini-retreat, it left me yearning and motivated to gather that group (or a similar group like them) again and encourage them in their faith.

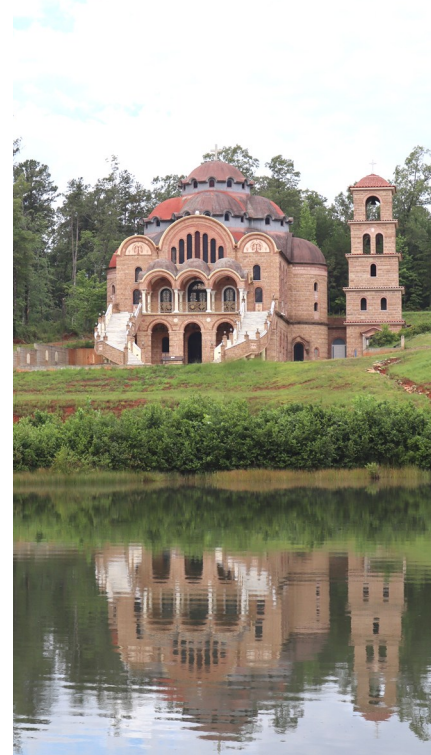
Another beautiful aspect of camp is seeing kids get to be kids, and even enjoying being a kid myself. Camp is the only time of the year I throw water balloons, I laugh more at camp than I do anywhere else. Lessons are learned outside rather than in a classroom on the ropes course. Kids let down their guard, they say the funniest things. There is opportunity for serious discussion about faith and life. Usually when you get people together, they want to socialize and by the time it is time to learn, there is precious little time left. At camp, there is so much social time that when we sit down to learn, they are eager to learn and talk and share. The most uplifting part of camp is confession day, when the campers and staff sit down with a priest and not only confess sins, but receive some encouragement and direction. While I don't remember the details of any specific confession (at camp or at church in Tampa), there was a theme that went through this year, as there is every year. And the theme this year was loneliness. Kids feel alone, unseen, unheard, disconnected, lost. And as a result, there are other sins – pornography, resentment towards parents, cheating in school, drug and alcohol use – and it seems that a lot of this comes from the same center point, loneliness. I left camp with a lot of deep thoughts on this subject, what can we do to help our kids feel less lonely?

I have been involved in St. Stephen's Summer Camp since 2000, and since 2001, I've had the privilege of leading 41 weeks of camp. Being a teenager was definitely the most difficult and awkward years of my life. I feel like my teenage

experience has given me a lifetime of empathy for teenagers. It's easy for me to talk to teens – I give them the encouragement and direction that I wish I had been given. I am thankful to God and to our Metropolitan Sevastianos for the privilege of doing this each year, and with their blessings, I hope to do this for many more to come.



ST. STEPHEN'S CAMP PHOTOS



*ST. STEPHEN'S
CAMP—
SUMMER 2025*



LITURGICAL SCHEDULE FOR AUGUST

Friday, August 1	<u>HOLY CROSS</u> Orthros Paraklesis	9:00a.m. 6:00p.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Sunday, August 3	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Monday, August 4	Paraklesis	6:00p.m.		
Wednesday, August 6	<u>TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST</u> Orthros Paraklesis	9:00a.m. 6:00p.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Friday, August 8	Paraklesis	10:00a.m.		
Sunday, August 10	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Monday, August 11	Paraklesis	6:00p.m.		
Wednesday, August 13	Paraklesis	6:00p.m.		
Thursday, August 14	Great Vespers of Dormition	6:00p.m.		
Friday, August 15	<u>THE DORMITION OF OUR MOST HOLY LADY THE THEOTOKOS AND EVER VIRGIN MARY</u> Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Sunday, August 17	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Sunday, August 24	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Friday, August 29	<u>BEHEADING OF THE HOLY AND GLORIOUS PROPHET, FORERUNNER AND BAPTIST JOHN</u> Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Sunday, August 31	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Sunday, September 7	Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Monday, September 8	<u>THE NATIVITY OF OUR MOST HOLY LADY THE THEOTOKOS AND EVER-VIRGIN MARY</u> Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.



The Transfiguration of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—August 6



The Dormition of the Theotokos—August 15



The Beheading of St. John the Baptist—August 29

LITURGICAL NOTES FOR AUGUST

Friday, August 1- Procession of the Holy Cross- This feast day was established in the middle ages, to thank God for simultaneous victories that the Greeks have over the Saracens and the Russians had over the Bulgars. In both battles, the soldiers carried crosses. It then became a tradition for the Holy Cross to be carried in procession in Constantinople on August 1, to be placed in Hagia Sophia from August 1-13 and then to be returned to the church of the imperial court where it was kept on August 14. This feast day is also a great way to begin the fast of the Dormition. It is one of three feast days of the Holy Cross(though not often celebrated), along with September 14 and the third Sunday of Great Lent.

Paraklesis Services of Supplication to the Virgin Mary- The service of Paraklesis or “Intercessory Prayer” to the Most Holy Theotokos, the Mother of God, is chanted during the fasting period of the first fourteen days of August, preceding the Feast of the Koimisis or “Falling Asleep” of the Virgin Mary, which is August 15. In this service, we ask the Theotokos to pray for us with her Son and our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not the Theotokos who saves us. God saves us. Thus we do not pray to the Theotokos, but we pray through the Theotokos, that through her intercession, we may find favor with God. We ask her to join us in extending our prayers to the Lord. The Paraklesis Service is chanted not only for fourteen days in August, but can be chanted in at any time of the year, for those who are in need of prayer in time of sickness, despair, struggle, or any occasion, since any of life’s experiences provide us an opportunity for prayer. The Paraklesis Service consists of soft, melodic chants of supplication to the Virgin Mary, and lasts about an hour. It is also one of few services in the church where we commemorate individuals out loud during the service. You will find a place to write the names of you and your families, loved ones and friends (who are living) to be commemorated at the Paraklesis Services in the August Messenger. The Feast of the Dormition will be celebrated on Friday, August 15. We should all attempt to keep the feast, at least from meat, during the first fourteen days of August, and we should each plan to receive Holy Communion on August 1,3,6,10 or 15. Paraklesis dates for 2025 are: Friday, August 1 (6:00p.m.), Wednesday, August 6(6:00pm.), Friday, August 8 (10:00am.), Monday, August 11(6:00p.m.) and Wednesday, August 13(6:00pm.) Paraklesis will be held once a month beginning in September.

Wednesday, August 6- Transfiguration of our Savior- We read in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke, how Jesus was Transfigured on Mount Tabor in the presence of His Disciples. Matthew 17:2 says, “His face shone like the sun and His clothes became as white as the light.” Jesus was shown in the fullness of His glory as God, and standing beside Him were Moses and Elijah, the two greatest prophets of the Old Testament. This showed the Disciples that the man Jesus was indeed God as well, and pre-figured His glory at the Resurrection and Ascension. Grapes are blessed at the end of the Divine Liturgy on August 6. This coincided in past centuries with the blessing of the harvest. The “harvest” for Christ are all those who have dedicated their lives to following Him. Because this event occurred historically only a few weeks before Holy Week, it is connected to the harvest of Christian souls that was ready to be had after the Resurrection. Because this feast day is so important, and would have been lost in the midst of the Lenten cycle, the church moved it to August 6, exactly 40 days before the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on September 14, since the Transfiguration took place a few weeks before the Crucifixion.

Thursday, August 14- Great Vespers for the Feast of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary –

In the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church, the day begins with the setting of the sun. On August 15, we celebrate the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. But the actual feast begins with the setting of the sun on the evening of August 14. An evening service, called Vespers, announces each new day. In most parishes, Vespers is only offered a few times a year.

For instance, in Tampa, we do Vespers on January 6 in the evening, as the prelude of the feast of St. John the Baptist on January 7. There are a few other times of the year we offer this service as well. There is a tradition of an “Epitaphios” of the Virgin Mary. Most of us know the term “Epitaphios” as it relates to Christ in the tomb. In fact, the word “Epi-taphios” literally means “ in the tomb”. On Good Friday, we lay the “Epitaphios” of Christ into the Kouvouklion, the tomb of Christ. There is a tradition of doing the same thing on August 14, laying an “Epitaphios” (icon of the Virgin Mary in the tomb) in a Kouvouklion from August 14-23 (which is the leave-taking of the Dormition).

Friday, August 15 – Dormition of the Virgin Mary – This is one of the Twelve Major Feast days of the Church Year, and commemorates the Falling Asleep of the Virgin Mary. When the Virgin Mary died, all the disciples were present, save for Thomas, who could not get there in time for the funeral. When Thomas arrived, they opened the tomb for him to pay his respects to the Virgin Mary. The tomb was found empty, save for the belt of the Virgin Mary. Her body, along with her soul, had been assumed into heaven. This shows us that those who are righteous will be taken to heaven. It is not just Christ who went to heaven, but all of us can go. The Virgin Mary was not God – she was one of us, and shows to us, in the most excellent example, of what it means to live a life of obedience to God. We honor her above every person, even every angel, as we chant, “Greater in honor than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim (Cherubim and Seraphim are two order of angels, the ones who stand closest to God), you without corruption gave birth to God the Word, and are truly Theotokos, you do we magnify.”

Friday, August 29 – Beheading of St. John the Baptist – St. John the Baptist, according to the Gospel accounts, was beheaded in prison. St. John had spoken out against Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. This man had a lawful wife, the daughter of Arethas, the king of Arabia. Without any cause, and against every commandment of the Law, he put her away and took to himself Herodias, the wife of his deceased brother Philip, to whom Herodias had borne a daughter, Salome. He would not desist from this unlawful union even when John, the preacher of repentance, the bold and austere accuser of the lawless, censured him and told him, “It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife” (Mark 6:18). Thus Herod, besides his other unholy acts, added yet this, that he apprehended John and shut him in prison; and perhaps he would have killed him straightway, had he not feared the people, who had extreme reverence for John. When Salome, Herodia’s daughter, had danced in order to please him and those who were supping with him, he promised her – with an oath more foolish than any foolishness – that he would give her anything she asked, even unto the half of his kingdom. And she, consulting with her mother, straightway asked for the head of John the Baptist in a charger. Hence this transgressor of the Law, preferring his lawless oath above the precepts of the Law, fulfilled this godless promise and filled his loathsome banquet with the blood of the Prophet. So it was that all-venerable head, revered by the Angels, was given as a prize for an abominable dance, and became the plaything of the dissolute daughter of a debauched mother. As for the body of the divine Baptist, it was taken up by his disciples and placed in a tomb (Mark 6:21-29). We commemorate this event each year on August 29, which is also a strict fast day. As St. John the Baptist is the patron saint of our parish, we honor this feast day, and we pray for his intercessions over each of us and our parish.



NAMES TO BE COMMEMORATED FOR PARAKLESIS SERVICES

Please write the names (**first names only**) of all those who you wish to be commemorated during the Paraklesis services.
Please mail into the office by July 30 or bring to the church as soon as possible.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____



COMMUNITY NEWS

Women's Bible Study on Tuesday mornings with Fr. Stavros will be on hiatus for the summer. It will resume on **September 9 at 10:00am.**

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 August the dates are: Tuesday August 5, Tuesday August 12, Tuesday August 19 & Tuesday August 26.**

TWO Meetings of Ministry Heads in August—There will be two meetings of Ministry Heads during the month of August, one on Zoom and one in person. The first meeting will be on **Monday, August 4 at 7:30pm.** This will be a single subject meeting. This meeting will be held via Zoom, so that we can look at the calendar on a shared screen. If you have specific calendar dates, please send those ahead of time to Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com. The second meeting will be on **Monday, August 25 at 6:30pm.** This one will be in person, so we can discuss ministry issues for the fall. Each ministry is asked to have at least one representative present at each respective meeting.

Youth Worker Seminar—There will be a Youth Worker Training Seminar on Saturday, **August 9 from 9:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.**, at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Tampa for GOYA Advisors, JOY/HOPE Advisors, Sunday School Teachers, older GOYAns (10th-12th Grade), and anyone who works with youth. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis will lead it, at no cost, to learn more about how to impart the Gospel of Jesus Christ to our youth in ways that are safe, fun and meaningful. Lunch is included. (Agenda: Learn how to lead an icebreaker, discussion and best practice of working with youth) RSVP: to Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com by Tuesday, August 5. Questions: Call Fr. Stavros at 813-394-1038

Prayers for School and College students—All school students and teachers (high school and below) are invited to participate in a special prayer that will be held at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on **August 10**, prior to the beginning of the public school year. Fr. Stavros will offer a special prayer for all of our students and teachers as they begin the new school year. **All college students and professors** are invited to celebrate the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, **August 3** with us. At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, Fr. Stavros will offer a prayer for all college students as they begin a new school year.

Young Adult Dinner/Discussion— Thursday, August 14 —We will be resuming our once a month Young Adult Dinner/Discussion on Thursday, August 14 from 7:00-9:00pm. All young adults ages 18-40 are invited to participate. We will be having a monthly discussion based on some set topics. If you are interested in getting notices via What's App, contact Aris Rogers at 813-309-5525.

Mandatory Altar Boy Meeting & Training Sunday, August 17—All altar boys are requested to attend a meeting on Sunday, August 17, following the Divine Liturgy. We will go over procedures on how the altar boys serve, updating and making a few small changes. This meeting is important for new altar boys but also older ones, as we seek to continue to improve our service. The meeting will last approximately 1 hour. Each boy is asked to have at least one parent present. New Schedule to take effect on August 17. As of publication time, the new altar boy schedule is still being finalized. All altar boys will receive a copy of the new schedule prior to August 17.

GOYA Meeting on Sunday, August 17—Our first GOYA meeting of the new school year will be held on **Sunday, August 17 from 5:00-7:30p.m.** in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner will be provided. One parent of each GOYAn is asked to attend the meeting. Also, there will be a parent's meeting, while the GOYAns meet with Fr. Stavros, to go over procedures for the year, review the yearly calendar, fill out emergency forms and arrange for parents to sign up to do a meal for one of the meetings.

GOYA Lock-in on Saturday, August 23—Our GOYA will have an end of summer lock-in on Saturday, August 23, beginning at 5:00pm. in the Church Hall.

Men's Group— The Men's Group will meet on **Sunday, August 24 at 5:00pm.** We will walk to a nearby restaurant and have dinner and then come back to church for a discussion, concluding by 7:30pm. All men of the community are welcome to participate.

Choir Season Starts!—It's the beginning of choir season! As we start up the new year, it's a great time to join. We don't have any major holidays for a while, so you can get in the swing of choir! Our rehearsals are Wednesday evening at 7:15pm, and we meet on Sunday mornings at 9:15am. Our first rehearsal will be and our first choir liturgy will be **August 10th.** See you in Choir!



INSPIRATION

God Is Talking To You My Child...

*If you seek me with all your heart,
you will find me...
Deuteronomy 4:29*

*Delight in me and I will give you the
desires of your heart...
Psalm 37:4*

*For it is I who gave you those
desires...Philippians 2:13*

*I am able to do more for you than you
could possible imagine...Ephesians 3:20*

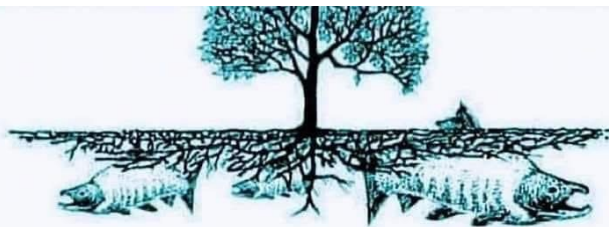
To be continued...

*The enemy didn't tempt Adam and Eve to murder,
steal, or tell a lie. He tempted them to question the
Word of God. His tactics haven't changed.*

Twelve Rules for a Happy Marriage

1. Hold hands. . . a lot.
2. Never yell at one another unless the house is on fire.
3. If one of you has to win an argument, let it be your spouse.
4. If you have to criticize, do it rarely and lovingly.
5. Never bring up mistakes from the past.
6. Neglect the whole world rather than each other.
7. Never go to sleep mad.
8. At least once a day compliment your spouse.
9. When you've done wrong, admit and ask for forgiveness.
10. Kiss.
11. Never be angry at the same time.
12. Be your spouse's biggest fan.

*I asked God "Why are you taking me through troubled water?"
He replied, "Because your enemies can't swim."*



I LOVE THIS ANALOGY

When GOD wanted to create fish, HE spoke to the sea. When GOD wanted to create trees, HE spoke to the earth. But, when GOD wanted to create man, HE turned to himself. Then, GOD said "Let us make man in our image and in our likeness."

If you take a fish out of water, it will die; and when you remove a tree from soil, it will also die. Likewise, when man is disconnected from GOD, he dies.

GOD is our natural environment. We were created to live in HIS presence. We have to be connected to HIM because it is only in HIM that life exists. Let us stay connected to GOD.

A monk asked a holy man: how can we perform miracles? The holy saint answered:

If you teach a person to read the Gospel, you have opened the eyes of the blind.

If you teach a person to help the needy, you have healed the paralyzed.

If you teach a person to go to church, you have healed the crippled.

If you lead someone to repentance, you have raised the dead.

Now go and perform a miracle.

*Satan's goal was not to see Job suffer.
His goal was to see Job sin in his suffering.*

Jesus told the story of the Prodigal Son to make a simple point: Never mind what you've done, just come home.

Care most of all for your soul, brother, it is your only treasure. Everything else you own, doesn't really belong to you. ~St. Nikolaj Velimirovic

*If you don't want to attend the
Divine Liturgy, then why would
you want to go to heaven?*

*No one changes unless they want to.
Not if you beg them. Not if you shame
them. Not if you use reason, emotion, or
tough love. There's only one thing that
makes someone change: their own reali-
zation that they need to do it. And
there's only one time it will happen:
when they decide they are ready.*

~Lori Deschene

*If I could teach my kids anything, it
would be to pray. Pray as soon as fear
or anxiety creeps in. Pray when
troubles and trials come. Prayer
before they try to figure it out on their
own. Because if they learn to pray
first, God will give them His wisdom.
God will give them peace that passes
understanding. And He will lead
them on the right path.*

*Lord, fix me, because sometimes I am the problem. There are
days when my pride builds walls, my words wound, or my
impatience clouds my love. Give me the strength to let go of
my stubbornness, my fears, and my self-centered ways. Fix
me, Lord, because I can't fix myself. Shape me into the person
You've called me to be—more loving, more forgiving, more
like You. Keep working in me. Amen.*

PARISH REGISTRY

BAPTISM— Charles Theodore Nenos, son of John Byron Nenos and Catherine Libbie Whatley, was baptized on June 22. Dr. Ioannis Pappou was the Godparent. Na Sas Zisi!

BAPTISM—Jonas Dhimitri, son of Enea Dhimitri and Katerina Dhimitri, was baptized on July 6, 2025. Georgio and Dimitra Savva were the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

BAPTISM—Bryson Aleksander Justice, son of Nicole Justice, was baptized on July 12, 2025. Dora Morgan was the Godparent. Na Sas Zisi!

BAPTISM—Charles Gray Howard, son of Chase Edward Howard and Jordan Elizabeth Gray Howard, was baptized on July 27, 2025. John Howard and Brooke Howard were the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

WEDDING— George Edward Moran III and Maria Sofos Demos, were married on June 8, 2025. Dina Sofos Rainey was the sponsor. Congratulations!

WEDDING—Eric Anthony Heidemann and Irene Celia Garcia, were married on June 28, 2025. Katherine Anastasia Nammour was the sponsor. Congratulations!

WEDDING—Jose Damian Rivadeneira and Jacqueline Guerra, were married on July 13, 2025. Markos Mangarides was the sponsor. Congratulations!

FUNERAL— Mia Ciotti, infant daughter of John and Melanie Ciotti, was laid to rest on July 15. May her memory be eternal!

PROTEVANGELION OF ST. JAMES

We are all familiar with the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These are the canonical Gospels that are part of the canon of the New Testament. There are several other "gospel" texts by Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus, and Thomas, among others, that did not make the New Testament canon of Scripture but are studied and some value has come from each.

One of these "apocryphal" texts is the "**Protevangelion of St. James**", sometimes called The Gospel of James. The author of this text is James, the brother of the Lord, who was also the first bishop of Jerusalem, and the author of the Liturgy of St. James. He is not one of the twelve disciples but is in the group of the Seventy Disciples. A significant amount of the "gospel" is dedicated to the birth and life of the Virgin Mary. And a lot of our tradition and hymnology on the Virgin Mary is drawn from this text. We read also and Joachim and Anna, the parents of the Virgin Mary. There are twenty-five chapters in this gospel, the 25th is only a few short concluding verses. The other 24 chapters are divided into three equal parts – the first eight chapters contain the story of Mary's birth and childhood. The second eight chapters are about Mary being raised in the Temple, and then betrothed to Joseph as her protector. The last eight chapters are about the Nativity and hiding from Herod when he was slaughtering the innocents.

Because we celebrate the Dormition of the Virgin Mary in August, her nativity in September and her entrance into the Temple in November, we are going to share the **Protevangelion of St. James** in the Messenger over the next four months, with six chapters each month. We should all be in the habit of reading the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John on a regular basis. But a read through of this apocryphal Gospel (which is not found in the Bible) would be helpful in our understanding of things related to Jesus and the Virgin Mary which are not in the Bible, but which appear in our Tradition and hymnology.

The Protevangelium of St. James is an infancy gospel dating to the 2nd century. Though it is considered an apocryphal work, it nonetheless influenced Christian understanding of the lives of Our Lady and St. Joseph.

~THE PROTOEVANGELIUM OF ST. JAMES

CA. A.D. 125~

I

1 In the histories of the twelve tribes of Israel it is written that there was one Ioachim, exceeding rich: and he offered his gifts twofold, saying: That which is of my superfluity shall be for the whole people, and that which is for my forgiveness shall be for the Lord, for a propitiation unto me.

2 Now the great day of the Lord drew nigh and the children of Israel offered their gifts. And Reuben stood over against him saying: It is not lawful for thee to offer thy gifts first, forasmuch as thou hast gotten no seed in Israel.

3 And Ioachim was sore grieved, and went unto the record of the twelve tribes of the people, saying: I will look upon the record of the twelve tribes of Israel, whether I only have not gotten seed in Israel. And he searched, and found concerning all the righteous that they had raised up seed in Israel. And he remembered the patriarch Abraham, how in the last days God gave him a son, even Isaac.

4 And Ioachim was sore grieved, and showed not himself to his wife, but betook himself into the wilderness, and pitched his tent there, and fasted forty days and forty nights, saying within himself: I will not go down either for meat or for drink until the Lord my God visit me, and my prayer shall be unto me meat and drink.

II

1 Now his wife Anna lamented with two lamentations, and bewailed herself with two bewailings, saying: I will bewail my widowhood, and I will bewail my childlessness.

2 And the great day of the Lord drew nigh, and Judith her handmaid said unto her: How long humblest thou thy soul? The great day of the Lord hath come, and it is not lawful for thee to mourn: but take this headband, which the mistress of my work gave me and it is not lawful for me to put it on, forasmuch as I am an handmaid, and it hath a mark of royalty. And Anna said: Get thee from me. Lo! I have not done such things and the Lord hath greatly humbled me: peradventure one gave it to thee in subtilty, and thou art come to make me partaker in thy sin. And Judith said: How shall I curse thee, seeing the Lord hath shut up thy womb, to give thee no fruit in Israel?

3 And Anna was sore grieved and mourned with a great mourning because she was reproached by all the tribes of Israel. And coming to herself she said: What shall I do? I will pray with weeping unto the Lord my God that he visit

me. And she put off her mourning garments and adorned her head and put on her bridal garments: and about the ninth hour she went down into the garden to walk there. And she saw a laurel-tree and sat down underneath it and besought the Lord saying: O God of our fathers, bless me, and hearken unto my prayer, as thou didst bless the womb of Sarah, and gavest her a son, even Isaac.

III

1 And looking up to the heaven she espied a nest of sparrows in the laurel-tree, and made a lamentation within herself, saying: Woe unto me, who begat me? And what womb brought me forth for I am become a curse before the children of Israel, and I am reproached, and they have mocked me forth out of the temple of the Lord?

2 Woe unto me, unto what am I likened? I am not likened unto the fowls of the heaven, for even the fowls of the heaven are fruitful before thee, O Lord. Woe unto me, unto what am I likened? I am not likened unto the beasts of the earth, for even the beasts of the earth are fruitful before thee, O Lord. Woe unto me, unto what am I likened? I am not likened unto these waters, for even these waters are fruitful before thee, O Lord.

3 Woe unto me, unto what am I likened? I am not likened unto this earth, for even this earth bringeth forth her fruits in due season and blesseth thee, O Lord.

IV

1 And behold an angel of the Lord appeared, saying unto her: Anna, Anna, the Lord hath hearkened unto thy prayer, and thou shalt conceive and bear, and thy seed shall be spoken of in the whole world. And Anna said: As the Lord my God liveth, if I bring forth either male or female, I will bring it for a gift unto the Lord my God, and it shall be ministering unto him all the days of its life.

2 And behold there came two messengers saying unto her: Behold Ioacim thy husband cometh with his flocks: for an angel of the Lord came down unto him saying: Ioacim, Ioacim, the Lord God hath hearkened unto thy prayer. Get thee down hence, for behold thy wife Anna hath conceived.

3 And Ioacim sat him down and called his herdsmen saying: Bring me hither ten lambs without blemish and without spot, and they shall be for the Lord my God; and bring me twelve tender calves, and they shall be for the priests and for the assembly of the elders; and an hundred kids for the whole people.

4 And behold Ioacim came with his flocks, and Anna stood at the gate and saw Ioacim coming, and ran and hung upon his neck, saying: Now know I that the Lord God hath greatly blessed me: for behold the widow is no more a widow, and she that was childless shall conceive. And Ioacim rested the first day in his house.

V

1 And on the morrow he offered his gifts, saying in himself: If the Lord God be reconciled unto me, the plate that is upon the forehead of the priest will make it manifest unto me. And Ioacim offered his gifts and looked earnestly upon the plate of the priest when he went up unto the altar of the Lord, and he saw no sin in himself. And Ioacim said: Now know I that the Lord is become propitious unto me and hath forgiven all my sins. And he went down from the temple of the Lord justified, and went unto his house.

2 And her months were fulfilled, and in the ninth month Anna brought forth. And she said unto the midwife: what have I brought forth? And she said: A female. And Anna said: My soul is magnified this day, and she laid herself down. And when the days were fulfilled, Anna purified herself and gave suck to the child and called her name Mary.

VI

1 And day by day the child waxed strong, and when she was six months old her mother stood her upon the ground to try if she would stand; and she walked seven steps and returned unto her bosom. And she caught her up, saying: As the Lord my God liveth, thou shalt walk no more upon this ground, until I bring thee into the temple of the Lord. And she made a sanctuary in her bed chamber and suffered nothing common or unclean to pass through it. And she called for the daughters of the Hebrews that were undefiled, and they carried her hither and thither.

2 And the first year of the child was fulfilled, and Ioacim made a great feast and bade the priests and the scribes and the assembly of the elders and the whole people of Israel. And Ioacim brought the child to the priests, and they blessed her, saying: O God of our fathers, bless this child and give her a name renowned for ever among all generations. And all the people said: So be it, so be it. Amen. And he brought her to the high priests, and they blessed her, saying: O God of the high places, look upon this child, and bless her with the last blessing which hath no successor.

3 And her mother caught her up into the sanctuary of her bed chamber and gave her suck. And Anna made a song unto the Lord God, saying: I will sing an hymn unto the Lord my God, because he hath visited me and taken away from me the reproach of mine enemies, and the Lord hath given me a fruit of his righteousness, single and manifold before him. Who shall declare unto the sons of Reuben that Anna giveth suck? Hearken, hearken, ye twelve tribes of Israel, that Anna giveth suck. And she laid the child to rest in the bed chamber of her sanctuary, and went forth and ministered unto them. And when the feast was ended, they gat them down rejoicing, and glorifying the God of Israel.



SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS: AUGUST 2025



Welcome to Sunday School

Welcome to the 2025–2026 Sunday School Year! We hope you had a restful and refreshing summer. As we look forward to a new year of learning and growing in faith together, we're excited to kick off Sunday School on August 17! Thanks to your generous support and participation in the Arise and Build campaign, renovations to the Ministry Building are now underway. While our new second-floor Sunday School space is being completed, we will temporarily hold our weekly classes in the Administrative Building. We can't wait to see you soon and begin this new year together! God bless you.

Registration is Now Open

Online Registration is now open!
Please register at: [25/26 SUNDAY SCHOOL REG](#)

Class Placement: Toddler 2s through Pre-K 4, must meet the age requirement by September 1 to enroll in the appropriate class. EX: Toddler 2s Must be 2 years old by 9/1, Pre-K 3 Must be 3 years old by 9/1. Kindergarten -High School students should register according to the grade they are entering for the 25/26 academic school year.

This Month's Topics

Aug 17th: First Day of Sunday School/
The Theotokos

Aug 24th: Church Etiquette

Aug 31st: No Class/ Labor Day Weekend

Our Sunday School Purpose

Our Sunday School exists to serve both parents and children. We serve parents by coming alongside them in their effort to teach their children about our Orthodox Faith with the love for the Lord and a heart to serve Him. We serve children by providing a safe and enjoyable environment where the Word of God is taught faithfully and Christ is exalted.

Meet Our Team

Director of Sunday School: Zackie Ameres
Music/Special Programs:
Donna Trakas and Lindsey Skourellos

Toddler 2's: Jenny Paloumpis
Pre-K 3: Mary Guirguis - Teacher
Tia L'Hommedieu - Assistant
Pre-K 4: Denise Panos - Teacher
Rachel Zaharis - Assistant
Kindergarten: Debbie Nicklow - Teacher
Donna Trakas - Assistant
Grade 1: Maraquet Edquid- Teacher
Doukissa Moshos - Assistant
Grade 2: Nicole Mantzanas - Teacher
Jaime Brewer - Assistant
Grade 3: Amy Kafantaris -Co- Teachers
Stacie Garcia -Co-Teachers
Grade 4: Georgia Kane - Co Teachers

Grade 5: Vickie Peckham - Teacher

Grade 6: Katherine Kyrus - Co Teacher

Grades 7 & 8: Betty Katherine Katsamakis Teacher
Marina Choundas - Assistant
High School Girls: MaryAnn Konstas - Teacher
High School Boys: James Konstas - Teacher



Contact



Look for our Sunday School email every Friday afternoon for weekly updates. Please let us know if there is any specific way we may better serve you and your child during their time in Sunday School.
Zackie Ameres -Phone: 813.245.3813
-Email: Zackiec@yahoo.com

**ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
YOUNG ADULTS' MINISTRY
PRESENTS**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2025
10 AM - 4 PM**



\$25

registration

ages:
20-40

FINDING MY PURPOSE: USING MY SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO ANSWER GOD'S CALL FOR MY LIFE

**A FALL SPIRITUAL RETREAT LED BY
FR. STAVROS AKROTIRIANAKIS**

**IDENTIFY YOUR PURPOSE, CONNECT WITH
LIKEMINDED PEERS, HEAR GOD'S WORD**

**RSVP BY SEPTEMBER 21:
STJOHNTPA.YOUNGADULTS@GMAIL.COM**

2418 W SWANN AVE, TAMPA, FL, 33609

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

Orthodoxy 101

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

WHY SHOULD I ATTEND ORTHODOXY 101?

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

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

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

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

WHEN WILL THE CLASSES BE HELD?

- MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 8
A TOUR OF THE
ORTHODOX
CHURCH, WHAT WE SEE
AND WHAT IT MEANS
- MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 15
INTRODUCTION TO THE
SACRAMENTS. BAPTISM
CHRISMATION,
CONFESSION, MARRIAGE,
UNCTION
- * MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 22
THE DIVINE LITURGY –
A “TEACHING” LITURGY
- * MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 29
ORTHODOX TRADITIONS –
FASTING, ICONS, PRAYER
AND LIVING AN
ORTHODOX
CHRISTIAN LIFE

WHAT FORMAT CAN I EXPECT?

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

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

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

There is no charge for this class.

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

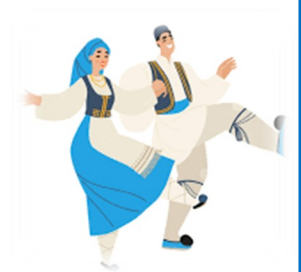
DANCE GROUP

PANIGYRI ADULT DANCE

The Panigyri dancers will continue dance practices in August starting **Wednesday 8/13/25 @ 7:15 pm in the Kourmolis Center.** Practices will continue thereafter each Wednesday night at 7pm unless otherwise notified. Also on **Wednesday 10/22/25** our dance practice will begin at 7:30 pm as our dance group will attend a church service for St. James prior to dance practice.

These practices will get us ready for line-ups and our performances at our upcoming Greek festival in November. Dancers should wear comfortable clothing and sneakers or dance shoes. C'mon out and get ready to dance! Opa!

*Any questions please contact
Alex DeMaio at 813 340 9668.*



BOOKSTORE

*The **Theotokos and Ever- Virgin Mary** is eternally present at the throne of God interceding for mankind. Knowing this, we pray for her love, guidance, and protection. Every year the Orthodox Church sets aside the first fourteen days of August for the Dormition Fast in her honor. The fast period is culminated on **August 15th** when the Church gathers to celebrate the **Feast of the Dormition (Falling Asleep of the Theotokos)**. In commemoration of this Great Feast, throughout August our bookstore will offer many items honoring the **Theotokos** – Icons, Akathist and Prayer books, jewelry etc.*



Stop in. We are open every Sunday following Divine Liturgy.

ADULT GREEK SCHOOL

St. John Greek Orthodox Church Adult Greek School

Want to Learn Modern Greek?



Teacher born, raised, and educated in Greece with 27 years of experience teaching the Greek language. Adult classes for beginners taught @ St. John Greek Orthodox Church (2418 W. Swann Ave, Tampa, FL 33609). Classes are held at 12:30-3:00pm on Saturday afternoon, starting on September 20, 2025. This will be the first of three sessions, with each session lasting three months.

- Speak Greek
- Read Greek
- Write Greek
-
- Basic Grammar & more.
- Some Greek History
- BOOK INCLUDED IN PRICE

Price per session is \$125 for church members and \$150 for non-members
Contact Ms. Magdalini Myer: at (813) 523-5771, aspis69@aol.com
or the church office at (813) 876-8830

DONATIONS NEEDED FOR:

- ♦ FLOWERS FOR THE ICON OF THE DORMITION—\$100
(THIS ICON WILL BE DISPLAYED **AUGUST 14 AND 15**)
- ♦ GRAPES FOR THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION. WE NEED ENOUGH GRAPES CUT IN SMALL CLUSTERS SO THAT WE CAN GIVE ONE SMALL CLUSTER TO EVERYONE IN CHURCH ON **WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 6.**
- ♦ ARTOKLASIA—**5** LOAVES (WHICH CAN BE BAKED OR PURCHASED FROM HELLAS BAKERY IN TARPON SPRINGS) FOR VESPERS ON AUGUST 14

*IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN DONATING EITHER OF THESE,
PLEASE CONTACT FR. STAVROS.*

COLLEGE STUDENT OUTREACH

Attention College Students- WE NEED YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION –

We want to stay in touch with our college students this upcoming school year. Please scan this QR code and send us your contact information. Thank you.

2025-2026 College Student Contact Information

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



Save the Date – Nov 7-8, 2025



The Annual St. John the Baptist Tampa Greek Festival is our largest fundraiser and provides an opportunity to unite as a Parish and Community.

We need your help!

Coming Soon: Details for a summer kickoff meeting!

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: 8/16 & 9/20.

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

The AHEPA Family of Tampa held the Scholarship Awards event on June 20, 2025, with great success! At the event five scholarships were awarded to some of the most amazing college-bound students in our community. In addition, several Daughters were recognized for their contributions to the organization. The participants enjoyed the most delicious meal, which was prepared by the Daughters. There was also a plethora of donated desserts to choose from. The Daughters are grateful to all who helped with the event, and to all who have been helping us throughout the year to raise money and or for generously donating to our scholarship fund. Wishing our students great success!



Students with their Families at the AHEPA Family of Tampa Scholarship Awards

Our president Ourania Stephanides had the opportunity to attend the AHEPA Congressional Banquet which was held May 21 in Washington D.C.



Mayflower Hotel Washington DC- May 21



At Congress-May 22

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 at www.DaughtersofPenelope.org.

JOY TWEENS

Welcome to the 2025-2026 school year! Our Holy Orthodox Primary Education (**HOPE**) & Junior Orthodox Youth (**JOY**) ministries have many fun activities planned for this year.

In addition to the **HOPE/JOY** combined events for all children in grades 6th and below, we will have meetings and various activities for our JOY Tweens group(grades 4th-6th) at least once per month. Our first welcome meeting will be in September following Divine Liturgy. Keep a look out for more information in the weekly Bulletins and monthly Messengers.

We pray that the JOY Tweens Ministry will give our children at this pivotal age an opportunity to develop their faith while also strengthening bonds with their peers through age-appropriate activities centered around worship, fellowship and service. Please, mark your calendars and plan to join us for fun and fellowship.

We can't wait to see you!

STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship Report

We have reached the end of the first half for 2025. As of June 30th, 236 families have returned their Stewardship forms, and another 84 have contributed without turning in a form. That's 320 total families and individuals who have answered the call, resulting in \$606,129 given and committed so far. There are still 90 families that have not renewed their Stewardship for 2025. Please let us hear from you today if you have not yet renewed your pledge 2025 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 have any questions or comments that you would like to share.

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.~



YOUNG AT HEART

Our 55+ group gathered for our 1st annual Indoor Picnic on Saturday, July 19th.
We enjoyed a delicious selection of picnic fare and learned a lot about St. Mary Magdalene,
Equal to the Apostles.

Join us for our next event on Friday, August 15 following Divine Liturgy.



YOUNG AT HEART AUGUST GATHERING

Join us on **Friday, August 15th** for the Commemoration of
THE DORMITION OF OUR MOST HOLY LADY THE THEOTOKOS
AND EVER VIRGIN MARY

Orthros – 9am
Divine Liturgy – 10am
Potluck luncheon to follow



Contact Presvytera Denise if you plan to attend and to specify the item you will provide for the luncheon. (Fasting restrictions for the day apply)

NURSING MINISTRY

Busting Some Sunscreen Myths

MYTH: The more time you spend outside, the less likely you are to get sunburned.

TRUTH: There is truth that having a tan complexion, or more melanin in your skin, does have protective factors against sun damage and skin cancer. However, this does not preclude you from acquiring skin cancer or having cosmetic sun damage issues later in life. Getting a suntan is not healthy and there is no such thing as a health tan or a healthy sunburn. The sun does the opposite of making your skin stronger. The same thing can be said for tanning beds. The UV exposure from a tanning bed increases your risk of skin cancer by 75%!

UV exposure also causes visible aging, wrinkles, a leathery skin appearance and scaly patches of skin. It's important to remember that skin damage starts with your very first tan, and each time you tan, that damage builds, creating more genetic mutations and a greater risk.

MYTH: Sunscreen is toxic and worse than the sun damage it helps prevent.

TRUTH: Sunscreen does have chemicals, but sunscreen itself does not cause skin cancer. Higher amounts of sun exposure and having risk factors like a lighter complexion or a freckly phenotype are associated with an increased risk of skin cancer.

While sunscreen is not dangerous, it's important to remember that tanning oils are. Those can accelerate the rate of sun damage to your skin that will not only leave you with acute evidence of sun damage like a sunburn, but chronic sun damage that shows visible aging, freckling or skin cancers.

MYTH: Cooling down the skin can help prevent sunburns.

TRUTH: Cooling down can reduce your body temperature but it does not reduce your risk of sunburn. UV rays can penetrate and reflect off the water or even snow and still cause damage to your skin.

MYTH: Sunscreen blocks vitamin D production.

TRUTH: Vitamin D is produced in the skin when it is exposed to ultraviolet B (UVB) rays from the sun. While sunscreen blocks most UVB rays, it does not block all of them. The safest way to manage your vitamin D levels is with nutrition supplements, not by tanning.

Did you know...

- Someone needs a blood transfusion every two seconds
- One in three people will need a transfusion at some point in their life
- One blood donation can save up to three lives



Your Nursing Ministry will host a blood drive on **Sunday, August 24 from 11:30am-3:30pm.**

To donate, you must be at least 16 years old, weigh 110+ pounds, and be in generally good health.

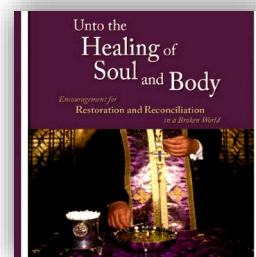
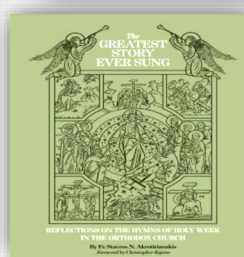
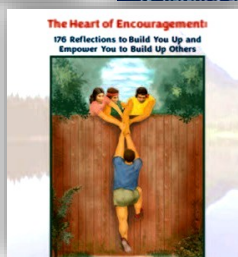
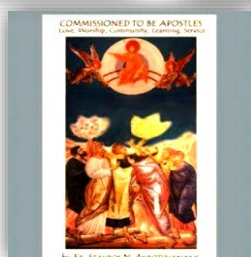
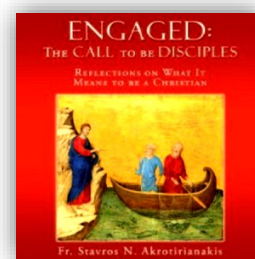
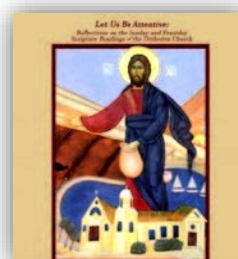
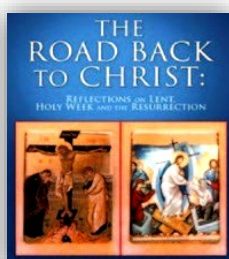
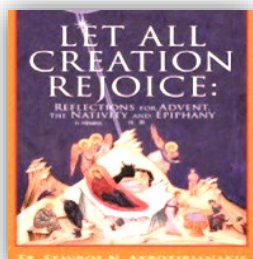
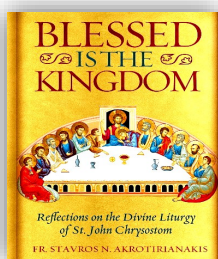
Donating blood is one way you can be a hero and help save lives. Please consider donating.

REACH OUT TO YOUR NURSING MINISTRY FOR ANY QUESTIONS

FR. STAVROS BOOKS

FR. STAVROS HAS PUBLISHED 9 BOOKS THAT ARE
AVAILABLE BOTH IN THE BOOKSTORE AND ONLINE.
BELOW FIND ALL HIS BOOKS:

Blessed is the Kingdom;
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 Feast day 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



This month's submission for our One Word comes from a parishioner from St. John. Please enjoy this "one word" encouragement.

I had to double check myself that my word was what I thought it was, which is depth. My Bible verse is **Romans 8:39**: "*nor height, nor depth, nor any created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.*"

I have begun to experience the joys of highs and lows with our Lord. It's actually harder to remember Him during the high times. But when I look at how and why I'm at this high level, I realize it's only because of Christ, and that helps me appreciate Him more. At my low times I'm more apt to pray and ask for help. Still working on the patient part.

I originally chose "depth" because I wish to go deeper in my love of Christ and my Neighbor. My prayer is to have more soul touching times in prayer, in liturgy, and in my relationships with others. My "depth" has been challenged especially with my difficult relationships. I found only prayer and positive thoughts for others is my answer. This is an ongoing challenge. I fall many times and struggle to return to prayer.

Thank goodness that Our Lord has a lot of patience with me.

P.S. My positive relationships with animals is much easier to attain in good or bad situations. My dog is one of my best teachers of heights and depths.

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 **5,354** people on the Prayer Team.

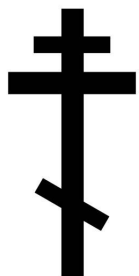


INTERESTED IN JOINING THE PRAYER TEAM?

Over 5,354 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.*

Follow Us on Social Media



St. John the Baptist



Let's Get Connected for Our Latest News & Updates



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on Instagram @stjohntpa

stjohntpa.org

2418 W. Swann Avenue
Tampa, FL 33609

(813)876-8830

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

Have you downloaded our App?

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

Do you Like our Facebook page? Like our page and suggest it to your friends. Announcements are posted frequently so you are up to date with everything going on at St. John the Baptist. You can find our page at StJohnGOCTampa.

We Are Live

Our services are live streamed through our church website.

<https://stjohntpa.org/live/>

Youtube

Subscribe and turn on notifications so you don't miss a sermon, weekly update, or Bible study.

<https://www.youtube.com/@st.johnthebaptistgoc Tampa/5658>



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.

JUNIOR OLYMPICS 2025

*Our annual **GOYA Junior Olympics** was successfully held **June 6-8** at St. John! GOYAns and advisors from around North and Central Florida came together for a weekend of athletic competition and fun!*

*Special thanks to **Dwight Forde, Michael Palios & Zackie Ameres** for chairing this event and to all the volunteers who helped make it happen!!!*

Below you can find a few pictures from the event, but you can always visit our [Flickr](#) account to view even more!




**Go For The
GOLD!!**





2025



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:

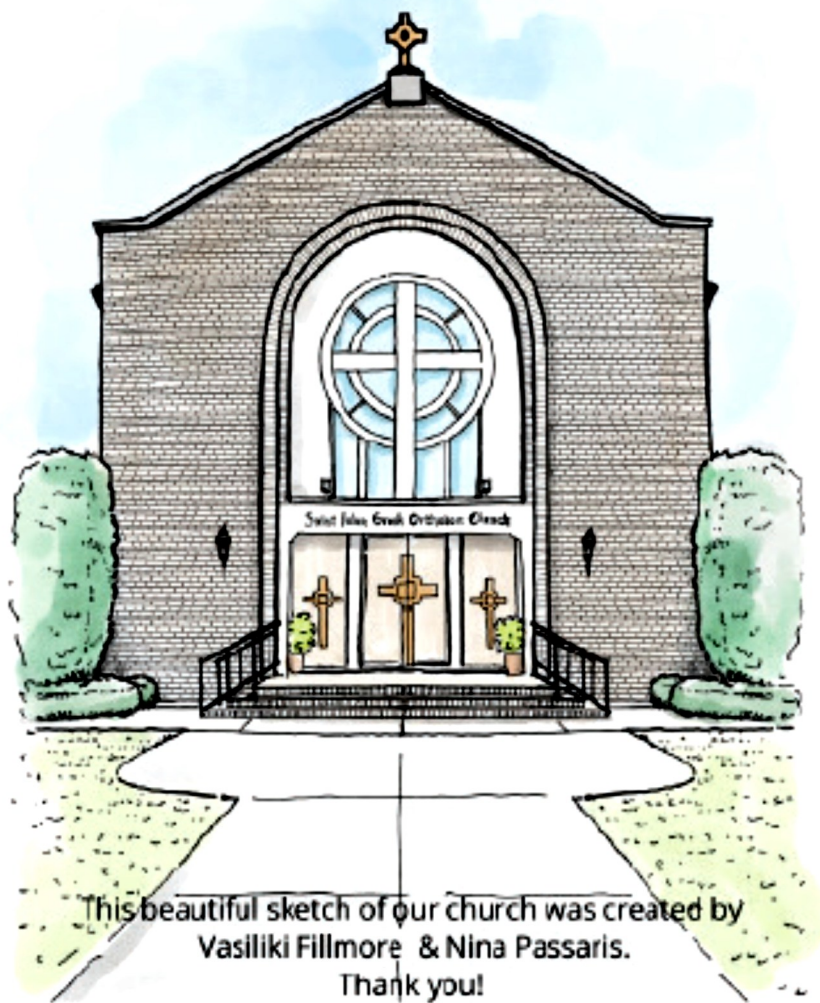
_____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ \$200 _____ Other

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

July 2025	August 2025						September 2025
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	
Fast Day					1 Holy Cross Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	2**	
					(Beginning of Dormition Fast)		
3** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Prayer for College students	4** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m. Meeting of Ministry Heads (Zoom) 7:30 p.m.	5** Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	6** Transfiguration of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	7**	8** Paraklesis 10:00 a.m.	9** Youth Workers Training Seminar 9:30a.m.-4:00p.m.	
10** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Prayer for school students	11** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	12** Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	13** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	14** Great Vespers 6:00 p.m. Young Adults 7:00p.m.	15 The Dormition of our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Young at heart	16 Sunday school teacher's meeting 9:00a.m.-12:00p.m. Community Outreach	
17 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Sunday school begins- Altar Boy Meeting GOYA kick-off 5:00p.m.	18	19 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	20**	21	22**	23 GOYA End of summer lock-in 5:00p.m.	
24 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Men's Group 5:00p.m.	25 Meeting of Ministry Heads in Person 6:30 p.m.	26 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	27**	28	29** Beheading of the Holy and Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	30	
31 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.							

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX
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TAMPA, FL 33609-4712
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OFFICE@STJOHNTPA.ORG
WWW.STJOHNTPA.ORG

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*As it is written in Isaiah, "Behold, I send my messenger before Thy
face, who shall prepare thy way; the voice of one crying in the
wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight--
"Mark 2:3*