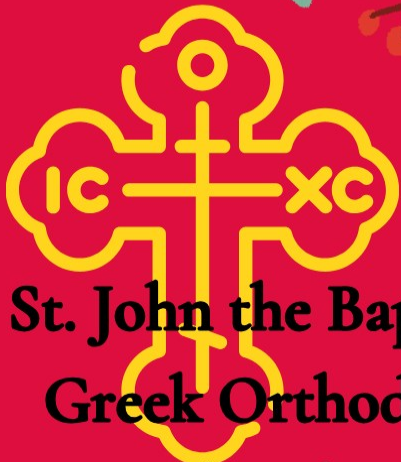


December 2023 Edition

THE — MESSENGER —

Nativity of our Lord
December 25



St. John the Baptist
Greek Orthodox
Church

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



VISION:
Love God, Love your neighbor and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ as an Orthodox Christian community.

MISSION:
The mission of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is to welcome and serve people with love, truth, joy and peace, and to create an environment that encourages all to seek salvation through Orthodox Christianity.

CORE VALUES:
Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

St. John's Directory

Timetable of Services

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

Weekdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.

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Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. Stratton Dorozenski 813-876-8830 (Office)	College Student Program Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis 414-254-5134	Philoptochos Katherine Sakkis 813-309-1073
Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830 (Office) jwstefero50@hotmail.com 678-637-4425 (Cell)	Community Outreach Greg Melton 813-967-2074 Connect Through Christ - Special Needs Ministry for Children Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534	Stewardship Chris Kyrus 757-672-1920 George Mitseas 813-748-1220 Sunday School Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102
Parish Council John Zelatis, President 813-727-2271 Euripides Panos, Vice President 813-352-3972 Marilyn Sandborn, Secretary 813-760-6289 Gary Ward, Treasurer 813-846-3898 Jim Armstrong 954-295-6665 Amin Hanhan 813-846-2957 Nick Katzaras 863-581-2430 Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855 Alexis Scarfogliero 813-892-1599 Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026 Mike Xenick 813-340-8737	Dance Groups H XAPA ΜΑΣ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668 Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963 ΠΑΡΕΑ, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136 ΠΑΝΗΓΥΡΙ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668 Daughters of Penelope Elena Paras Ketchum 813-229-0144 Festival Mike Xenick 813-340-8737 Finance Committee Gary Ward 813-846-3898 Food Pantry Sandra Pappas 813-785-3747 Gasparilla Parking Volunteer Needed GOYA Michael & Bessie Palios 813-523-0346 Hope/Joy George & Zackie Ameres 813-245-3813 Joy Tweens Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963 Junior Olympics Dwight Forde 561-310-5034 Men's Fellowship Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038 Parish Nursing Ministry Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026 Oratorical Festival	Usher Pete Trakas 813-505-2193 Veterans/1st Responders Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830 Website / Social Media / APP VOLUNTEER NEEDED! Welcoming Ministry Maria Xenick 813-765-3587 Women's Bible Study Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038 Young Adult Aris Rogers 813-309-5525 Young at Heart Dora Morgan 813-613-3738 Youth Protection Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855 12 Disciples Mathew Balasis 727-421-7376
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Buildings & Grounds Euripides Panos 813-352-3972		

Fr. Stavros' Message

Guide Us To Thy Perfect Light



The Nativity Fast for Orthodox Christians began on November 15. In our parish, for the fourth year in a row, we gave out Nativity Bags, with lots of things to use to make this Nativity season more meaningful. The centerpiece of our bags this year is a desk calendar, which has a verse to meditate on each day. The theme for this year's Nativity journey is "Guide Us to Thy Perfect Light." No one can complete, or really even start, a journey without a destination in mind. And once the destination is known, then we need a guide to get there. For instance, when we drive somewhere, before we start the car and drive, we know where we are driving to. Street signs and landmarks guide the way. A GPS or phone app also helps. Without streets, signs and apps, it would be hard to complete a journey, even if we know what the destination is.

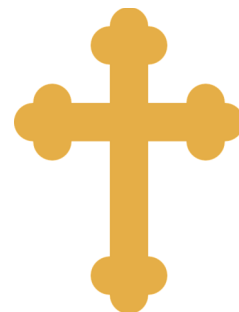


Christmas is one of the most apparent examples of this. Many people do not understand the destination when it comes to Christmas. December 25 is a day to open presents and hang out with family. It's almost like we've forgotten that the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is the reason for this entire season. That's why so many people feel empty after the shopping sprees, together with heavy traffic, long lines, expensive prices and cranky shoppers, are over, after the leftovers of Christmas din-

ner have been cleaned up and we ponder how big the credit card bill will be come January. Never mind the journey, we can't even understand the destination.

There is good news. On December 1, there will still be 24 shopping days left, but seriously, there will still be 24 days to prepare for Christmas. Here is a helpful hint: If you don't understand the destination, Christ, take these 24 days of December and read the Gospel of Luke—it is 24 chapters long. And then you will have a better understanding of the destination. Use the Nativity calendar and the other tools in the Nativity bag—these will help in the journey.

And when Christmas is over, don't look at it as the end of a journey, but the end of one step of a larger journey, the journey to salvation which covers the span of our lives. Each year, we have this journey, and thankfully, the calendar provides us this opportunity to contemplate the meaning of salvation, the Incarnation, and of our own existence and place in the story of the world's redemption as well as our own personal salvation. We should use these opportunities to take steps on the path to salvation. A journey is measured in miles and sometimes in simple steps. I have driven across America several times in my life, and the beginning of a 3,000 mile journey seems daunting. When making this journey, I didn't think about the totality of the miles. I thought about how much I wanted to cover in a day, or before lunch. And it's the same thing with the Christian life. We should decide on a certain amount to cover this year, and additional steps each year during Great Lent, then additional steps during next year's Nativity journey and so forth.



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Take Time to Breathe This Christmas Season

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Merry Christmas



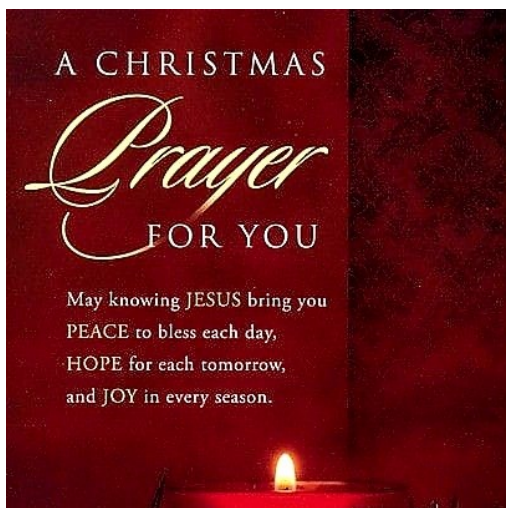
'Tis
The
Season.



Jesus
Is the
Reason!

We've all had the experience of being out of breath. Usually that happens when we have to run someplace. A slow, steady walk should not leave us out of breath. Taking a deep breath is restorative, not taxing. Most people use the phrase "hustle and bustle" when it comes to describing the Christmas season, not a season of deep breaths and peace. And yet that is what it is supposed to be.

Outside of Lent, the month of December will offer us the greatest number of Liturgical services. The Divine Liturgy will be celebrated 19 times in December, which is actually more than any other month of the year. It will be celebrated every day from December 17-25. In the week where there seems to be the greatest stress in running around to prepare for Christmas, the church will respond by making it a quiet, contemplative week. It will afford us the opportunity to breathe every day.



I saw a funny meme the other day which said "Instead of giving gifts this Christmas, I'm just going to give you all my opinion on things." Not sure how I'd feel about getting a plethora of opinions as a gift.

But here is a gift that is always appreciated, and that is the gift of prayer. What if you told your family, "I'm going to pray for you this Christmas." Meaning taking some intentional, and even significant time to offer up someone's name in prayer. That's actually my favorite gift to receive, to know that someone has spoken about me to God. This Christmas season, we have ample opportunities to pray in the many Divine Liturgies that will be celebrated, in a day of prayer on December 18, where the church will be open all day for prayer, during a vigil of the Nativity on Christmas Eve. There are many opportunities.

As we have done the previous two years, we are going to create "Christmas Holy Week" in our parish for the week before the Nativity. Beginning on Sunday, December 17, the Divine Liturgy will be held once a day for 9 days (and two times on Christmas Eve), so that everyone in our parish will have the opportunity for some extra worship services as we prepare for the feast of the Nativity. On Friday, December 22, the Divine Liturgy will begin at 7:00 a.m., early in the morning, for people who are working, and also to afford us the opportunity to celebrate the Divine Liturgy at sunrise.

the Winter
Pascha



Additionally, the Christmas Candlelight service will be held in the evening of Monday, December 18. This is a great opportunity to invite someone who is non-Orthodox to a service, as it will be short (one hour) by our standards, there is no Eucharist, and there is also the opportunity to remember those who have passed away in the last year. The Royal Hours will be held at 9:30 a.m. on Friday, December 22.

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On Monday, December 18, we will have our annual “Day of Prayer” at St. John, where the church will be open all day for people to stop by and pray. The day will begin with Orthros at 9:00 a.m. and Divine Liturgy at 10:00 a.m. and then be open all day, concluding with our Christmas Candlelight Service from 6:00-7:00 p.m.

Day of Prayer

On Christmas Eve itself, there will be THREE services, with the hope that everyone will attend at least one of them. On Christmas Eve morning, we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy at 10:00 a.m. Christmas Eve is a Sunday this year so we will have the regular Sunday Divine Liturgy, which commemorates the ancestors of Christ. In the afternoon, we will celebrate Great Vespers at 4:00 p.m. For those unable to attend the Divine Liturgy in the evening, this service will afford us the opportunity to not only hear the Scriptures of the Nativity, but also the prophecy readings from the Old Testament which foreshadow the coming of the Messiah. Orthros for the Nativity will begin at 5:30 p.m., followed by the Divine Liturgy at 7:00 p.m.

There were a surprising number of people who came to Divine Liturgy on December 25 last year, and with the luxury of multiple clergy, we will again celebrate the Divine Liturgy at 10:00 a.m. on the morning of December 25. This is FOUR services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. I hope we will each make at least one of them. The truth is, over 1,200 people call St. John their spiritual home. We could conceivably fill the church for each of these services, if everyone came to one of them.

There is a well-known saying, “Keep Christ in Christmas.” And I can’t emphasize that enough. As another saying goes, “He is the reason for the season.” As we celebrate the Nativity, please do not forget Christ, its centerpiece. Going back to the theme of our Nativity journey, “Guide Us to Thy Perfect Light,” there is no

better guide in our spiritual journey than frequent worship.

The Greek Festival

The Greek Festival was an overwhelming success. As of this writing, we don’t have the total net income yet, as it takes several weeks to pay all the bills, and I’m writing this on November 9. (The gross was \$218K, of which we hope to net \$90K, and that was an amazing total considering we only had 1.5 days of the Festival). A big thank you to Mike Xenick, our overall Festival chairperson, who set the tone for the Festival as we opened the gates on Friday, with encouragement to lead with love. That was apparent the entire weekend as we greeted guests with smiles, enthusiasm and encouragement. Hundreds of people went on the church tours and hundreds more went into our church. A big thank you to Fr. John for leading the church tours and to our choir for singing on Saturday afternoon. Thank you for the “fab five”, our festival leaders, Mike Xenick, Chris Kyros, John Zelatis, Theo Panopoulos and Sandra Pappas. Thank you to our area heads. Thank you to everyone who baked and cooked and prepped the Festival. Thanks to John Demas and the Omega Project for our entertainment. Thank you to our dancers and their instructors—Genie Carter, Marina Choundas, and Alex DeMaio. Thank you to everyone who volunteered throughout the weekend. Thank you to those who came back early Sunday and who cooked and served the luncheon to the community. Sunday, November 6, was a great day—we began with Divine Liturgy in a full church, and ended with a luncheon for us, watching our dancers, everyone dancing one last Kalamatiano around the hall, and then people staying to clean up. A job well done by everyone!



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Stewardship

December is stewardship month. Because many people send in their stewardship form in the mail, we aren't collecting as many forms on one single Sunday as we used to. Therefore, we are not going to have a stewardship Sunday as in the past, but a stewardship month. We kindly ask that you send in your stewardship form to the office by no later than December 31, 2023. We also kindly ask that you fulfill the remainder of your 2023 pledge by the end of the year as well.



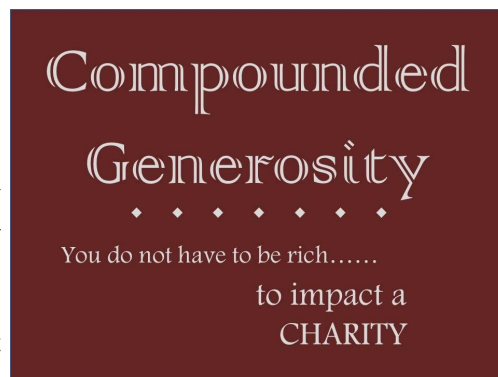
Our theme for Stewardship 2024 "Light of the world." The verse that we are basing not only our Stewardship on but the verse that will direct our parish in 2024 is "*You are the light of the world.*" (Matthew 5:14) We are on the cusp of an unprecedented opportunity. We are debt free. And in June 2025, we are going to be tenant-free. The school lease is coming to an end and we will have use of our facilities full-time. (Please see attached reports from Fr. Stavros and John Zelatis, Parish Council President). The vision for our community will no longer be to be a landlord, but to be a light in the world.

We will utilize our facilities full time for things that will serve our parish and the greater community. There is a gap between what we need to operate our parish without a tenant and what we are currently bringing in on stewardship. We need your help to bridge that gap monetarily so that we can be a full-time parish, so that we can be a light in the world every day. We need your talent as we explore new ministries. And most important, we need your time in prayer, so that Christ's vision of our church as being a light in the world will come to fruition.



The Biblical concept of the "tithe" was an offering of the first ten percent of one's goods to the temple each year. Yes, ten percent. But let's leave the percent and focus on the idea of offering our first-fruits to the Lord. We shouldn't pay all of our bills, get in all our entertainment, and take all of our trips, and then give the Lord the leftovers. We should take the first of what we have and offer that. I remember my mom telling us when we were kids that the week had 168 hours in it. But the first three hours each week were going to the Lord. We now had 165 hours to get all the other stuff done in. And it didn't matter if it was a hard week in school and we had lots of projects to do, it didn't matter if we were on vacation, we always gave those three hours to the Lord. Yes, we always went to church, even on vacation.

In order for our church to do what it is supposed to do, it takes a financial commitment from all of us, the collective body, and then our church is able to serve. The church



shines Christ's light on us as individuals, by making sure we have opportunities to worship, to have fellowship, and to learn in a spirit of love. The church, collectively, then shines the light of

Christ on the greater community in the form of charity and generosity.

Sometimes the church is the light for one person at a time, such as in counseling and confession. Your stewardship commitment helps that happen. Sometimes the church is the light for one family, such as at a sacrament. Sometimes the church is the light for a small group of people, such as in a ministry. Sometimes the church is the light for the entire congregation, such as in worship. And sometimes the church is the light for people outside of the church community—such as when we give to charitable organizations like LifePath Hospice, Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC), Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM), International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) FOCUS North America and the many other charitable organizations we support.

Everything we do in life should be motivated by our identity as being “the light of the world”—to be the light for someone else, to grow the light within ourselves, and to share the light of Christ with the world. For 2024, our budget again reflects a large emphasis on service through charitable giving, where we serve others. It reflects a



large emphasis on personnel who give us the opportunity to learn about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And it reflects a large emphasis on ministries who help us worship and deepen our sense of community. Taken in total, the budget reflects a parish which loves God and loves to serve others.

I hope you have when you fill out your stewardship form for 2024, you will have joy knowing that your contribution is making a difference—whether that is to the person who comes to confession and has a life-changing experience, or the person who comes to Bible study, Sunday school, GOYA, etc. and becomes more committed to the faith, or to the hundreds of people who worship each week and touch Christ in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, or to those who gather to celebrate their joys (weddings and baptisms) and sorrows (funerals). Your giving allows ALL of that and more to happen.

Every family—whether a small nuclear family, or a church family—in every generation has had to choose its priorities. Our parish is choosing the identity that Christ laid out for the church—He is the light of the world. (John 8:12) And we are to be the light of the world. (Matthew 5:14) Light was the first thing created by God in Genesis 1, and it is the one characteristic we share with the Lord. Please fill out your stewardship form in December, with an offering that reflects your desire to be the light of the world and to share that light with the world, beginning right in our parish, through your sacrificial offering. In a world that seems to put the individual above everything else, in our parish we strive to put God first, to serve others, and to receive the resulting joy for ourselves.

One final note on stewardship: Being financially independent of the festival will enable us to continue to serve the greater community through charitable giving. Having full use of our facilities will enable us to expand our ministries, bringing others closer to Christ, while at the same time coming closer to Him ourselves. And this is what our stewardship is building toward.

On behalf of Pres. Lisa and Nicholas, I'd like to wish each of you a Blessed Nativity and a Happy and healthy New Year 2024!

With love in the Incarnate Lord,
+Fr. Stavros



Sermon-State of our Parish-October 22, 2023

By Fr. Stavros

What do we want our church to be? What is our vision of the future at St. John? These are two very important questions that each of us needs to ask ourselves. The vision for many people is to have a place where they can go every Sunday to spiritually recharge. Nothing wrong with that. The vision for those who come really late and spend



more time in the hall than in the church is a place where I can have fellowship with my friends—I suppose one could do that anywhere but we have free

coffee. The vision for those who come to the occasional sacrament is to have a place to go for the occasional wedding, baptism or funeral. The vision of some is an insurance policy—in case there really is a God, let me go once in a while to make sure I have something on my spiritual resume.

Thankfully, the vision of many people includes life outside of Sundays at this church, and that is a good thing—many people come to worship on weekdays, it is not uncommon to have 20+ people here at a weekday liturgy. We have two Bible studies going all year round, and there were over 30 people in the recently completed Orthodox 101 class, so there is definitely a desire for education. Philoptochos and community outreach promote philanthropy, though not as many people participate in these ministries as probably could or should. A vibrant Sunday school, GOYA, HOPE/JOY, and a new tweens program help to teach our youth about Christ. A new college student group seeks to keep the demographic most likely to leave the church engaged. Our young adult group, which regularly brings 30 people to its meetings, is engaging new people all the time—some were lapsed and are coming back, some are new and seeking, and some have been here all the time and are glad that there is now a ministry for them.

We have a full church every Sunday and more and more people still moving to Tampa. These are all good things.

The question is—where do all these things lead? To an impressively full calendar? Fun times and good memories? A better understanding of Jesus Christ? An impact in our lives when we are not at church? An impact on our community of Tampa? Is the ultimate goal and destination the kingdom of heaven? Deepening of faith and personal repentance? What do you get out of belonging here? What should you be getting? How is what we are doing matching up to what Christ wants us to be doing?

The answers to all of these questions is found in our vision. And the truth is, we don't really have a vision. Yes, we have a statement written on paper of a mission, vision and core values, and probably most of us don't know them. We have a lot of good things going on at our church, but we don't really have a solid vision of where we want to go as a parish. We banter around ideas, but there isn't a solid idea of where we want to go. Today I want to talk about vision.

Of course, we are all flawed people, myself especially, so whatever vision we come up with for the church is going to be flawed. **So, rather than start with our own vision for the church, let's go right to the Bible, to the words of Jesus Christ, and see what He says about the vision of His church.**

I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Matthew 9:13 Jesus made this statement after He called Matthew, a tax collector, to be one of His disciples. Jesus was criticized for calling Matthew, of all people, a low life tax collector, to follow Him. Jesus' response was "Everyone is called to follow, especially the sinners." The church is supposed to be a spiritual hospital, which receives spiritually sick patients and provides healing for them. Hospitals don't turn people away, even when the injuries are the fault of the patients.

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Hospitals heal sick people, regardless of what has made them sick. And this is what the church is supposed to do, provide spiritual healing to those seeking it, regardless of how they came to be spiritually sick.

For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.

Luke 19:10 This quote also comes in the context of an encounter Jesus had with a tax collector. This time, the man's name was Zacchaeus. Jesus was walking through town and many people were crowding around Him. The Gospel tells us that Zacchaeus was short, and that He wanted to see Jesus, but crowd wouldn't let him. So Zacchaeus climbed up into a tree, because he wanted to see who Jesus was. And Jesus' eyes saw Zacchaeus, and He told Zacchaeus to come down from the tree, that Jesus would spend the day with him. The whole town looked at Zacchaeus as a pariah. He probably saw himself as a pariah. This encounter with Jesus changed his life—all of a sudden, he repented and desired to restore all the things he had stolen from people four-fold. And people couldn't celebrate this, they all complained why Jesus was hanging out with a sinner. And then Jesus said *"Today, salvation had come to the house of Zacchaeus, since he also is a son of Abraham, for the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."* *Luke 19:10* There are lots of people who are seeking to find Jesus. Some are sitting in the church today. And many are outside the church, seeking everything that Jesus is, and everything He calls us to be—they just haven't been introduced to Him. One of the reasons that people convert to Christianity is because they are invited, or sometimes come on their own, and they find truth, peace, purpose, all the things they have been looking for and missing, they find all of these things in Jesus Christ.

There is a golden opportunity for Orthodoxy, specifically, right now in our country. Many Christians are disappointed in their churches, as churches are shifting moral stances, and ultimately shifting truth and purpose. Many people in the recent Orthodoxy 101 class had no connection to this church, but are seeking a church which espouses truth and does not bend to contemporary shifts in moral thinking.

Which brings us to Luke 4:43, where Jesus says *"I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose."* Jesus, in the context of this verse, was addressing concerns of why He wasn't preaching exclusively to the Jews. Jesus said His goal was to preach to the Gentiles too. Orthodoxy is not just for Greeks, or people who have been raised in this church. It is for everyone, which is why ministries like our welcome ministry are so vital, because this ministry welcomes everyone who comes through the doors. And this is why we can't be insular in our thinking. This is why we celebrate services in English, because that is the common denominator for those who come through the doors. While we will enjoy our Greek Festival—I can wait to dance, play drums and eat Greek food—the church doesn't exist to promote or retain culture. That is a by-product of many of us being Greek. However, the common denominator among us is not being Greek but being Orthodox, which is why we lead with Orthodoxy. It saddens me that we have people who participate in the Saturday Greek school, or the adult dance group who never set foot in our church. But that's another issue for another day.

I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in Me may not remain in darkness. *John 12:46* Jesus was again being questioned about who He was and what He was doing, this time by the leaders of His own temple, people who were educated in the Old Testament, who should have realized who He was but just didn't. Much of our world is in darkness. That darkness might be poverty, a concern about a next meal casts a dark pall over everything else in the world. People in prison sit in darkness, because of their own shortcomings, and are often forgotten. Plenty of people sit in darkness, because they can't seem to find anything to look forward to, they feel trapped in sin, or they feel a lack of value.



And he said to them, "I must also preach the kingdom of God to other cities, because it was for this reason that I was sent."
Luke 4:43

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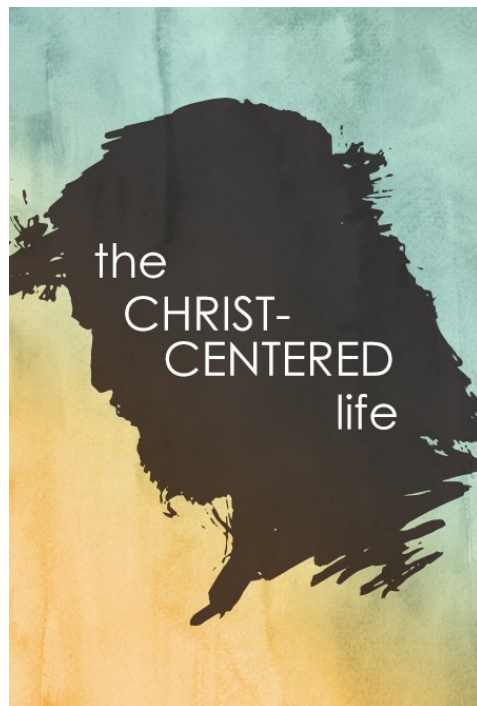
Thankfully, our parish supports ministries like Metropolitan Ministries, LifePath Hospice, Love INC, and Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry, all of which seek to bring light to those who sit in various kinds of darkness. But there's a lot more work to do here. You'll see in the budget presentation, that our charitable giving is going to be reduced next year. Charitable giving is directly driven by your stewardship. Stewardship is not keeping up with the rising costs of things like insurance and utilities, and so to balance the budget, we have to cut in discretionary areas like charitable giving. The standard of stewardship is supposed to be the tithe—ten percent of what we have is supposed to be joyfully offered back to God. After all, if He is the giver of every good and perfect gift, then everything positive that we have is a gift from Him. And stewardship is merely a giving back of what He first has given us. Stewardship ultimately is what drives parishes. And because collectively, we Orthodox have done a poor job in this area, churches, even ours, continue to need festivals, fundraisers and tenants just to make ends meet. Our average pledge in 2023 is \$1,600. The mean is \$1,000. Our stewardship numbers reflect a few givers at the top who give a LOT. The truth is we still have many people who give \$500 or less per year to the church. Most pledges probably do not represent even 1% let alone 10%. This is definitely an area for improvement.

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.
John 10:10 Jesus calls us to a life of abundance. We've had a wedding the past two Saturdays, and at each wedding, one of the prayers calls for the couple to have an abundance of grain, wine and oil, so that there is not only sufficiency for themselves but enough to share with others. Jesus does not call for us to be poor. Yet, He does use the word "sufficient" not "exorbitant." We should live with sufficiency, even abundance, but there should be a consciousness of helping those who are in need. We're not only talking about money here. We're talking about time and other things. There are people who have material sufficiency but who are sad, or lonely, or confused, or lost, who need help reaching a level of emotional sufficiency if not abundance. The church plays a role in that—that's what pastoral care is all about. But this church only has one full-time priest, and thankfully Fr. John is also here, and does a lot of pastoral care. But what about the pastoral care that goes beyond what we can offer in terms of time, or expertise? Can you imagine a day when our church employs a full-time Orthodox therapist? So that

pastoral care is available in abundance to those who need, especially those who need it and can't afford it, or who can't wait for a month or two to see a therapist because that how long the wait is for many of them?

Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20 This is the Great Commission, read over each person who is baptized in the church. It is not a great suggestion, it is a great commission, a great order.

This is the last thing Jesus said before He ascended into heaven. He told His disciples that the mission didn't end with the Resurrection, it wasn't limited to the Jews, and it didn't have a targeted number of people as the goal. The message of salvation is for all people and anyone who has received the message is now commissioned to help



spread it. The end goal isn't to understand who Jesus is, and live a Christ-centered life, just for yourself. The end goal is to live for Jesus and invite others to live for Him to, so that you, me and everyone is pointed in the direction of eternal life, and we each help each other to get there. That means I help you, and you help me, and we all help each other, and we all help those who have never heard of Christ, or who have heard but don't understand, we help everyone to get there.

What I have shared with you is Christ's vision of the church. It is not my vision, it is not the Orthodox vision, it is Christ's vision. So, we have to ask ourselves as individuals and as a community, do we share Christ's vision for the church? And if so, how are we going to implement that? If we decide that we do not share Christ's vision for the church, then whose vision do we share? Even a lack of vision is a vision.

Continued...

And if we share Christ's vision for the church, what do we need to change about ourselves and our community so that we can get there? Because while we are doing many of the things that Christ's envisions for the church, we aren't doing all of them. Our vision is not fully aligned with His, at least not yet.

In order to fulfill Christ vision to seek the lost and baptize all nations, we will have to quickly address the issue of our church sanctuary, which is not big enough to hold all the people who are here each Sunday—each Sunday we have people who end up sitting in the hall because there is no room in the church. If our church is going to continue to grow, we need more space in which to worship.



In order to bring in the proper personnel to not only minister to those who are here but to those who will be coming here if we want to fulfill Christ's vision of baptizing all nations, that is going to require more staff. In order to fulfill Christ's vision of being a light in the world, we need to step up charitable outreach, not step it down. Both of these things require an uptick in stewardship, and that rests on each of us working our way up to the level of giving that reflects what the Bible says, a joyful offering back to God or ten percent of what He has blessed us with. Again, the ten percent is not my number or my vision. It's right in the Bible. It's God's vision.

I want to address another subject, and this has to do with the charter school that we are currently renting to. For those who are new here, our church began St. John Greek Orthodox Day School in 1967. It's purpose ostensibly was to make money and educate our children. While it educated some of our children, as the community became more and more spread out, fewer and fewer of our children went there. As for making money, the school ran the church into millions of dollars of debt, through ex-

remely poor management by its administration. The church closed the school in 2012, and we were stuck with about \$2M in debt. The church has leased the school for the past 11 years. Our tenant, reassigned the lease to another company, and that company to another company, actions that basically have voided the lease we have. There is no lease at present. At the same time, our tenant is destroying our property. If you don't believe me, go over to the school building after church, and you will see a facility that is so filthy it will take but one call to the health department and they would be closed. If you don't want to walk that far, just go behind the office building and you will see a deck that is so treacherous, that you actually shouldn't walk on it. And if you don't want to walk that far, just go to the hall and you'll see a broken window, and a hole in the wall big enough to fit a person in, right next to the stage. I'm positive that Christ's vision of the church didn't include a tenant we have to chase down for rent each month, or a loud herd of students that is constantly disrupting our weekday worship services, or mouthy parents who regularly curse at the priest, or a 20,000 square foot building in which God's name is not allowed to be said Monday through Friday.



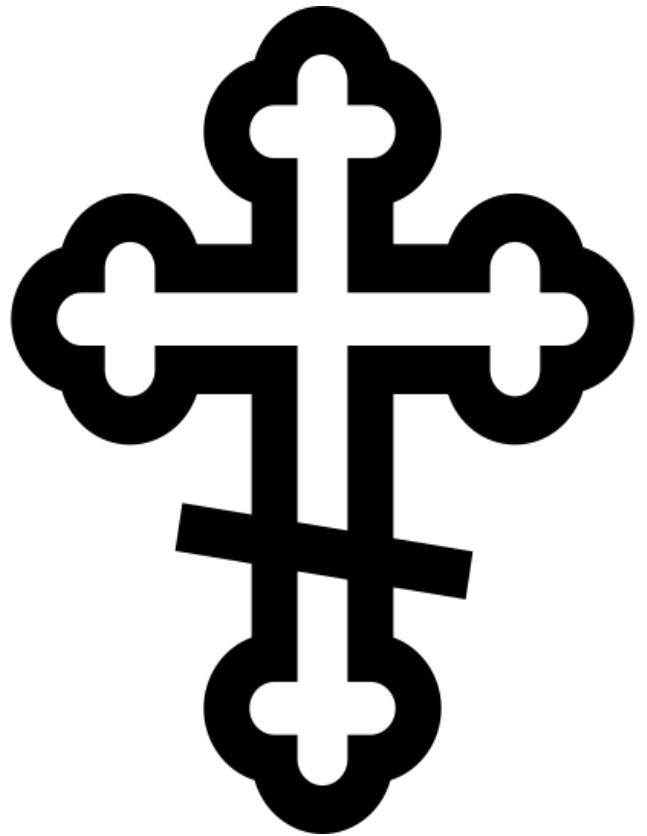
You will see in the budget that our tenant brings in \$270,000 in revenue and you probably think, in today's economy, that's good income, to support the church that we can't seem to support on our own. I see our situation a little differently. Now that we are out of debt, we don't need \$270,000 a year from the school to pay our mortgage. We need about \$20K of that money. We need about \$60K to pay utilities on that building. So we need about \$80K. We should easily be able to cover that with proper stewardship.

Continued...

Here's the vision I have for that building. First, to move our church offices in there. The current administration building has been falling apart for years. Sure the offices look nice when you enter them, but the roof leaks, the exterior walls are falling apart. What is the current church office can then be demolished to make more room for parking or whatever else we want it to be. What about the building itself? 20,000 square feet is more than adequate for offices and Sunday school classrooms. Here's an idea I thought of the other day, after I visited Ann Demas in the hospital. Ann is 94 years old, she's been a member of our church for decades. She told me the other day that she needs to call the office and cancel her subscription to the Messenger. She can't see very well anymore. What if we made one of the rooms in the school building a sound studio? And someone came and read the Messenger or the Prayer Team and we could send these things out with an audio version to those who can't read, or those who might prefer to listen to them being read in the car? What if our library became a small hall, so that small groups like Philoptochos or Bible study have a place to meet that can comfortably hold 25 or 30 people. That few people get lost in our huge hall. And that many is too many for a classroom. What if we had a small hall that was made to look like a cafenio, so our seniors could stop by each week for fellowship, just a place to hang out? What if we had a bona fide church library, filled with books people could check out on Sundays. How about a meeting space for a community-based ministry like Grief-share, or AA, or some other support group? We can't do these things at present because the building is constantly occupied.

Our church is going to face a fundamental question in a mere 20 months, because the new lease we have drawn up with the school will expire in 20 months, and it might actually expire much sooner if they continue to break it with impunity. The fundamental question is are we going to be a landlord or a church? And the second fundamental question is are we going to implement Christ's vision of the church, or continue to operate with a real vision? Nowhere in the Bible does Jesus say that being a church or a Christian is easy. To the contrary, He tells us to deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow. (Mark 8:34) And He tells us to put our treasure in heaven, our trust in Him, and our hope in eternal life. I spent last night here at the church with 17 of our older GOYAns, talking about issues of life and faith, and talking specifically about the traps they are falling into. The content of the conversation was

both shocking and motivating. Shocking because of what they are dealing with and motivating because as a church we want to help them. If I asked the same questions to the adults of our parish, and I'd love to actually, I'm sure the results would be the same. Given the opportunity to speak in total anonymity, the things are teens struggle with both in faith and in life are real, and I'm sure that we adults struggle with many of the same things. I'm so proud of our teens last night for their honesty and their candor and their willingness to talk about some tough stuff. And I'm sure that we, the adults of our parish, want to do everything we can to help meet that tough stuff that not only they, but we, face, with a vision that leads with Christ, with encouragement and with some real help. What will that vision look like? That is for us to decide. And that is for Christ to guide. I encourage you to attend our meeting next door and to be part of a vision that will be developed and implemented in the next 20 months. Proverbs 29:18 says "*Without a vision, the people perish.*" However, with Christ's vision, implemented in our vision for our parish, the future can be bright, for you, for me, for our teens, for those who know Christ and want to know Him better, and for those who do not know Christ and are seeking Him



President's Report—Delivered by John Zelatis, PC President

at the Parish Assembly Meeting on Sunday, October 22

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ. The State of our Parish is Good. Our Church is full. There are new faces every week. Young men, women, and families from different faiths are passing by to visit our Parish to see what we are all about. Just last Sunday we had two students who after attending Calvary Church, stopped by to see the inside of our Church and started asking questions about the iconography. Luckily, Father Stavros was also hosting a luncheon for college students at which point we asked them to attend, have some lunch, and learn more about our Orthodox faith. Philoxenia at work.

We still have our challenges. No pastoral assistant, infrastructure issues, tenant Issues, stewardship, rising costs, and the canopy repair.

In May of 2022, we had a coach bus which was Chartered by our tenant, run into and destroy the outdoor steel and brick canopy attached to our community center. It has taken us 15 months to begin repairs. Most of that time was dealing with the bus company's insurance provider. Their initial offer to complete the repairs was \$105,000. After receiving a quote from our contractor, and adding expenses incurred by our Parish to make emergency repairs to lift the City of Tampa Order to Vacate, we submitted a demand letter for almost \$195,000 in repairs. That was in December of 2022. It has taken us all this time and we are not done yet. Progressives last offer was \$187,500. I want to extend special thanks to Rip Panos for overseeing this project and Chris Kavouklis who has been acting as our attorney and for helping us deal with this situation.

Let's talk about rising costs, especially rising insurance costs. In January of this year, we had invited our insurance broker to prepare and guide us through the upcoming insurance premium increase. Our wind coverage alone was going to cost us \$70,000 plus an additional \$40,000 for liability coverage. Our proposed insurance increased dramatically over the previous year. But after careful review, consideration, and planning, our PC decided to forgo the wind coverage and self-insure. We would not have had that option available to us if we had not paid off the mortgage or had money in the bank.

While preparing for our insurance renewal, it is standard practice to ask our tenant for a certificate of insurance naming our Church as additional insured. We noticed the name of the Tenant had changed. We also noticed that the rent checks and the utility reimbursement checks were being written by a different company.

After further research, we came to find that our tenant had been sold to another company. Digging deeper, we also found our original tenant had been administratively dissolved by the FL Dept of State Division of Corporations. Both actions nullified the current lease. But why didn't they inform us?

This Parish Council has been working diligently on a new lease over the past few months. This new lease does not have any options to renew and will terminate on June 30, 2025. As a Church, and as Christians, we wanted to give the new entity ample time and opportunity to find another property to operate their Charter School. We were thinking more of the children and their families than anything else when we voted on the new lease terms. Special thanks to Mike Xenick for being our liaison to Bridge Prep and again, Chris Kavouklis for overseeing the lease negotiations.

So, we will not be landlords anymore after June 30, 2025. What does that mean? It means we can now fully focus on our Church's Vision, Mission, and Values. If you remember, we spoke about Vision, Mission, and Values.

A vision is a picture of future success; what we want to become. Vision is about our purpose, and it is also about our future.

A mission is what we do now, who we serve, and how we serve them. Mission is also about our purpose, but it is about our present.

Values are the core beliefs that guide our behavior and actions. Values are who we are, not who we would like to be or who we think we should be. WE DON'T WANT TO BE A LANDLORD!.

That's a big change for us. We were comfortable having that extra income come in every month. But at what cost? Our school building and community center are not kept up. We do not have peaceful enjoyment of our property. Also, the previous tenant replaced our school furniture without notifying us and without our permission. The furniture they replaced it with was purchased with public funds. That means when the tenant leaves, they must take that furniture with them. We will have no furniture for our Sunday School classes. Another added expense.

How do we overcome the thought of not having a tenant? We assess, plan, and act. But we can't do it without your support! It comes down to Stewardship.

Continued...



We have 325 families accounted for in our Parish. Of those, only 241 families have submitted a stewardship form. 84 families have submitted funds without a stewardship form. There are 91 families who have not submitted anything, and we are a few months away from the new year.

Our average pledge is \$1758 while our median pledge is \$1000. That means on average, our parish families are donating \$147 per month to St. John's. Stewardship is an investment in our spiritual growth, in the future of our community, our vision, mission, and values. Finally, our stewardship is an investment in our legacy. \$147 per month per family on average. **THAT HAS TO CHANGE!**

Change is a fact of life. We can fear it, accept it, or lead it. Change can be a source of anxiety, but it doesn't have to be.

We can be fearful of change and resist it, but that allows change to control us.

We can accept change and try to make the most of it. That's a little better, but it causes us to adapt to changes that are already occurring.

We can lead change by taking responsibility for steering changes in the best directions. That not only helps us accept change, but we determine the outcome of those changes. We need to move along with change. We need to enjoy change. Savor the adventure and enjoy what change can offer. Once a change has occurred, be ready for change to happen again, and be ready to enjoy that change, too.

"We cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are."

"If you keep on doing what you have always done, you will keep on getting what you've always got." Frankly, "what we've always gotten" isn't always what we needed.

So, I challenge every single one of you to Embrace and Lead Change. Lead it by asking yourselves, "What does it mean to be an Orthodox Christian?" "What does it mean to be a Servant Leader?"

I want to thank Father Stavros, Father, John, and Father Stratton, Jim Armstrong, Rip Panos, Gary Ward, Marilyn Sandborn, Marcelle Trantafilou, Suzanne Pileggi, Alexis Scarfogliero, Nick Katzaras, Amin Hanhan, Mike Xenick, and Sandra Pappas. But most of all, I want to thank each and every one of you.

Remember, your gifts are not about YOU, Leadership is not about YOU, Your Purpose is not about YOU.

It's about SERVING those who need your gifts, your leadership, and your purpose. That's what Christ did.

Take Advantage of the Parish Assistance Program

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is excited to share we will continue to offer the Parish Assistance program together with BayCare Behavioral Health. The program will provide our parishioners access to free and confidential counseling services - offering additional support when life's challenges become overwhelming. The PAP utilizes a network of faith-based providers that are sensitive to the values and beliefs of those they serve and provide compassionate care to children, adults, parents, and seniors. Parishioners can confidentially contact BayCare directly to request up to three free counseling sessions from a licensed mental health professional.

The BayCare helpline, 800-878-5470, is answered 24/7 by mental health professionals.

Many BayCare therapists are also offering telephonic and virtual counseling sessions to help parishioners maintain their emotional wellbeing during these trying times. You can get more information on the BayCare Behavioral Health Community Services Program on their website at: <https://baycare.org/services/behavioral-health/our-specialties/community-healthservices> Help is available for life issues including:

Help is available for life issues including:

Stress

Anxiety

Depression

Family discord

Marital problems

Substance abuse issues

Behavioral issues

This service is completely confidential between parishioner and a BayCare Christian Therapist

Inspiration

Interesting facts about Christmas

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

Bethlehem means “House of bread,” a symbol of the Eucharist.

Baby Jesus was born in a cave.

The Magi followed the star for over two years.

According to St. John Chrysostom, the star was the Archangel Gabriel.

The Magi-Gaspar, Melchior, Balthazar-came from different countries

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

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

CHRISTMAS

By Fr. Andreas Houpos

This is what happens when you eviscerate the Church of her theology, which is not abstract philosophical argument nor vague spirituality, nor sentimentality and nostalgia, nor is it grandstanding on “Scripture alone” while having castrated your communion of the life of faith that generated Holy Scripture in the first place.

The Church is not invisible. The Church is the body of Christ. The Church is a great mystery, and is experiential. The boy born in a manger is both the eternal God and fully human. He gave us that body in a mystery, to partake of the divine nature here on earth, while our nature, glorified in his flesh, has ascended beyond time and space.

Christmas isn’t about overeating with family and ugly sweaters. It’s about gathering with the faithful, after fasting, to receive first a precious morsel of the Eternal One, who clothed himself in us. This Communion gives glory to God in the highest, and brings peace to earth among humanity.

Keep both “Christ” and “mass” in “Christmas(s)”. We will be open. Get thee and thy house to the temple and partake of the greatest gift ever given.

Fr. Andreas Houpos is the Proistamenos of St. Nektarios Greek Orthodox Church in Charlotte, NC.

’Twas the Night Before Christmas—Merry Christmas My Friend.”

By Marine Corporal James M. Schmidt

’Twas the night before Christmas, he lived all alone,
In a one-bedroom house made of plaster and stone.
I had come down the chimney, with presents to give
and to see just who in this dwelling did live.
As I looked all around, a strange sight to see,
no tinsel, no presents, not even a tree.
No stocking on the mantle, just boots filled with sand.
On the wall hung pictures of far distant lands.
Medals and badges, awards of every kind,
a sobering thought came alive in my mind.
This house was different, it was dark, it was dreary.
I had found the home of a soldier, I could see that most clearly.
The soldier lay sleeping silent, alone.
Curled up on the floor in his one-bedroom home.
His face was so gentle, room in such disorder,
Not at all how I pictured a U.S. soldier.
Was this the hero, of whom I’d just read?
Curled up on a poncho, a floor for a bed?
Then I realized the other families that I saw this night
Out there lies the soldiers who are willing to fight.
In the morning around the world, children would play
Grown-ups would celebrate a bright Christmas day
But they all enjoyed freedom, each month through the year,
because of soldiers like the one lying here.

I couldn’t help but wonder how many lay alone,
on a cold Christmas Eve, in lands far from home.
The very thought brought a tear to my eye.
and I dropped to my knees and I started to cry.
The soldier awakened, I heard his rough voice,
“Santa, don’t cry, this life is my choice

Continued...

I fight for freedom, I don't ask for more.
My life is my God, my country, my Corps."
The soldier rolled over, and drifted to sleep,
I couldn't control it, and I continued to weep.
I kept watch for hours, so silent and still.
as both of us shivered from the cold night's chill.
I didn't want to leave him on that cold, dark night.
This guardian of honor, so willing to fight.
Then the soldier rolled over with a voice soft and pure.
He whispered, "Carry on Santa, it's Christmas Day, all
secure."
One look at my watch and I knew he was right,
Merry Christmas my friend,
May God bless you this night.

A Reflection on Christmas

His Eminence Metropolitan Methodios of Boston

Christmas is about the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is about love – eternal, unselfish and self-sacrificing love. It is about sharing and caring. It is about forgiving and reconciling. It is about respect for other people's human rights and dignity. It is about our yearning for peace here in America and throughout the world. It is about all those whom we have forgotten, the homeless and the hungry, the imprisoned and the rejected, the battered and the abused.

Saint John the Evangelist writes in the first chapter of his Gospel, "the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory as an only Son coming from the Father, filled with enduring love". Unselfish love is the reality of Christmas. We exchange presents on Christmas day to signify the treasure of God's love. In all the dazzle of TV ads and toys, of frenzied shopping, of the office parties and the staggering bills, we tend to lose sight of the enduring love of God. We tend to be so engulfed in possessions rather than focusing on the Messiah who emptied Himself to become a servant in order to emancipate humanity from servitude to sin.

We are distracted, I fear, by the shopping frenzy. Sadly, Christmas has been relegated to "making a list and checking it twice". The shameful assaults of consumerism dilute the Christmas joy that we should all experience.

Christmas should be a time for us to reflect on family life, on marriage, on love, on commitment, on the grace of God, on the design of God in our lives and our response to His call to salvation.

Christmas should be a time to reflect upon the gospel message and its power to change the world.

We celebrate today the incarnation of the Son of God. If peace, justice, compassion, reconciliation, and love are to become incarnate in our world, our hearts must be converted. "Peace on earth and good will toward men" can only become realities when they become incarnate in our hearts and manifested in our daily lives. Christmas is a time to accept the Son of God in our lives and be strengthened in our faith and commitment. Christmas is a time to slow down from our hectic pace for moments of prayer and reflection to communicate with God. Christmas is a time to share God's love with those in our midst who suffer, for God shed His Grace upon each of us in order that we may share His Grace, joy and salvation with everyone.

Christmas is a time to measure the influence of society on our lives: To evaluate our values, if you will. What values are portrayed in the media today? What religious and emotional impacts do advertisements and television and radio programs have upon us? Where is the message of Christ? Is it not tuned out by the glaring sounds of consumerism and materialism? Can we distinguish the melody of hope and joy associated with Christmas? Can we rejoice in the splendor of God's love? Can we celebrate His promise fulfilled?

We cannot if we have dashed about hurriedly, writing cards and attending parties, shopping and cooking and not stopping to reflect on the miracle of Christmas.

Christmas cannot be celebrated with glitter and tinsel, jingle bells and holly, because Christmas is all about life, birth, joy. It is about Love, the eternal, unselfish love of God. It is about the family of mankind sharing, caring, forgiving and being with one another. It is about respect for human dignity and freedom. It is about our yearning for peace. It is about the homeless and the hungry, the imprisoned, the despised, the battered and abused. It is about God and His love for each of us and how we share that love with our fellow human beings.

Let us grasp the true meaning of Christmas. Let us reach out for the redeeming truth and for one another in a reborn spirit of brotherly love.

May our Savior rest in the manger of our hearts and grant us health, peace, joy and every heavenly gift every day of the New Year.

Joy Tweens Ministry

Our JOY Tweens enjoyed their time together during their first movie night of the year. Thank you to our JOY Tweens who volunteered in the Kids Area during the Greek festival. You were all a big help!

We will be planning events for our tweens every month, either in conjunction with HOPE/JOY or separately just for our JOY Tweens. If you have children in 4th to 6th grades, please contact Maraquet Edquid (email: marquet@gmail.com/cell: 813-422-8963) with any questions.

Sign-Up for Text Updates!

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

JOY Tweens
movie night
October 27





St Johns Pageant Rehearsal and Youth

Christmas Party

Saturday

16

December

Kourmolis
Hall

10:30 am: Speaking Parts Rehearsal

11:15 am: All Participants Rehearsal

12pm: Lunch

12:30 pm: Boxes of Hope Service Project, Crafts & Party

RSVP to Zackie Ameres at 813.245.3813



Hope & Joy Fall Food Drive

Through Sun, Dec 16th.

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

Metropolitan Ministries' Holiday Tent helps 50,000+ families in need for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Let's help them meet this years goal of 1,763,000 pounds of food.

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

- Shop for any of the items below and bring to church **Through Sun, Dec 16th**.
- Donate \$25 or more (cash/ check/ gift card) for a Box of Hope-
Checks payable to Metropolitan Ministries

BOX OF HOPE contains:

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

Only non-perishable food donations please. ***Call Zackie Ameres at 813-245-3813 or email at zackiec@yahoo.com with any questions.*** Thank you!

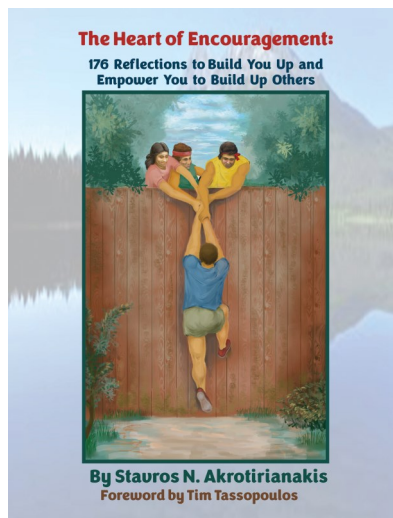
"He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will reward him for what he has done."

Proverbs 19:17



The Heart of Encouragement: 176 Reflections to Build You Up and Empower You to Build Up Others

By Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis



One of God's greatest blessings on my life is the ability to write. I love writing. For the most part it comes easy to me. By God's grace, I have written a daily reflection called "The Prayer Team" since February 2015. This has resulted in the publication of seven books, the latest of which is "The Heart of Encouragement." Each month this year, I'm going to include

one reflection from the 176 reflections of this book, as a way to share a small sampling of the contents with you in the hopes that you will buy this book. This is not about pushing a product. It's about sharing a message, a message we all need to hear. We all need more encouragement. Please read this reflection below, and if you like it, please consider purchasing the book for yourself or for someone else. It can be purchased from our bookstore or from Amazon/Barnes and Noble. Everyone wants to make a difference in the world. This book is my attempt to reach this parish and far beyond it with the hope that by God's grace, this book will help change the world even a little bit for the better.

+Fr. Stavros

Encouragement to be the Person God Created You to Be

Then God said, "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:26-27

I recently heard a podcast where the speaker talked about becoming the "best version of yourself."⁶ It was by Matthew Kelly, a notable Roman Catholic writer/speaker. His intention was not to say that we should become anything we feel like becoming, but rather to become the best version of who God created us to be. This is an important distinction because in today's society, it seems that we are continually told that the "best version of ourselves" is really anything we want to be. So, if society tells us that the best version of ourselves is rich, we start obsessing about money. A "society" of friends in college may tell us that the best version of ourselves is to live life to the fullest and encourage us to be drunk and fun-loving. A "society" of our peer group may tell us the best version of ourselves is to have children who are successful athletes and students who can get into the best college. And then the children of this "society" will have it ingrained in them that you can't be the best version of anything without the right college, the right sport, the right car, the right handbag, and so on.

It seems that society's message to us is that the best version of ourselves is either a) whatever society is telling us is right "this year" or b) whatever an individual thinks is right, right now. The message we receive speaks nothing of God and His desire for us to be the best version of who He created us to be, which would include using our talents and caring for others.

God calls us to use our talents to serve others and honor Him. In this way, we are all the same. Our individual talents and how we use them to serve others and honor Him varies from person to person. There is no "best talent" or "best way to serve." Rather, we are to do our best with what He has given us. When we do the best with what we have been given by God to serve others and honor Him, then we are the best versions of who He created us to be, the best versions of ourselves according to His measuring stick.

Our present challenge is that our society tells us to be anything we want to be and do anything we want to do, even if it is at odds with what God tells us, as if the greatest authority now is ourselves rather than God.

Continued...

Be who God created
you to be.

Our individual challenge then becomes how to be the best version of who God created us to be in a society where it's all about ourselves. It's hard to stick close to what God wants when it seems that everyone is trying to direct us away from that.

Encouraging others to be the best version of who God created each of us to be is part of esteeming others highly. Many people think respect is accepting people just as they are. Respect, however, is really encouraging people to be the best version of who God created them to be. As an example, take a teenager who doesn't like studying and spends all his time playing video games. Society might send a message that this teenager is academically challenged and that it's okay to play video games all the time if one is so inclined. To affirm, that message is actually disrespectful to this student. The right message is to be more focused and more diligent about studying. If one is so obsessed with video games, perhaps he should get the proper education so he can design games in the future. Real respect, really esteeming others highly is not to placate them for whoever they want to be but to encourage them to be the best they can be.

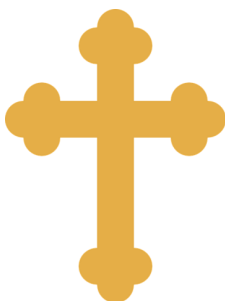
All creatures
GREAT and **small**
the **LORD GOD**
made them all

The above verses of Scripture remind us that we are ALL created in God's image, regardless of our talents and differences. We all are created in the same image, in the image of God. So when we honor one another, when we esteem one another highly, we are honoring God through the

image of another. And when we are the best versions of who He created us to be, we are honoring His image in us.

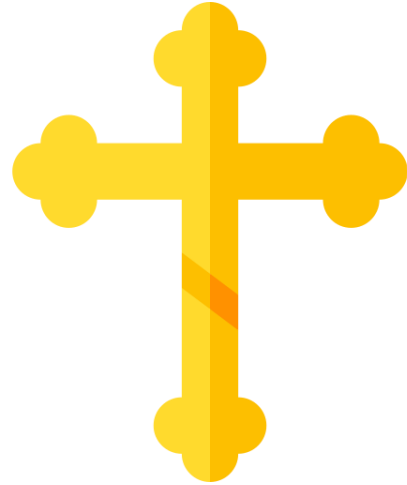
Lord, thank You for the gifts and talents that are unique to me (list them). Thank You for the opportunities that present themselves to me because of my talents (list them). Provide opportunities for me to serve others, and in so doing, honor You this day. Open my eyes to see these opportunities. Give me the strength and wisdom to be the best version of who You created me to be. Help me inspire others to be their best versions of who You created them to be. Amen.

Encouragement Challenge: Encourage one another to be the best version of who God created us to be!



MY WORD 2024

For the past five years, we've encouraged parishioners to identify one word that will shape their year. With 2024 now a month away, it's time to start thinking of the word that will define you in 2024. Towards the end of December, Father will send out a request for individual words to define you for 2024.



**A Beautiful Quote on stewardship/
charity from Tim Wakefield, Former
Boston Red Sox Pitcher, who recently
passed away at age 56.**

"Never forget where you came from.

Be a mentor to others.

You didn't get to where you are today by yourself and no matter what status you accomplish in life, you should assume the responsibility to help those who are less fortunate than you.

I've been involved with different charities my whole career and I can tell you that I've received much more than I've given.

I've also learned that it doesn't matter how much money you've made, how big your house is or what kind of car you drive. What matters most is: did you make a difference in someone else's life?"

Liturgical Schedule for December

Saturday, December 2 **St. Porphyrios of Kapsokalyvia**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 3 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, December 4 **St. Barbara/St. John of Damascus**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, December 6 **St. Nicholas**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, December 9 **St. Anna**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 10 Orthros 8:20 a.m. Doxology 9:30 a.m.
Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.

Our choir will sing the responses of "The Liturgy of Peace" by Christopher Kypros on this Sunday. Because this arrangement is so elaborate, we will begin the Doxology at 9:30 a.m., followed by the Divine Liturgy at 9:45 a.m.

Tuesday, December 12 **St. Spyridon**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, December 13 Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.

Friday, December 15 **St. Eleftherios**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 17 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, December 18 **St. Sebastian**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Christmas Candlelight Service 6:00 p.m.

Tuesday, December 19 Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

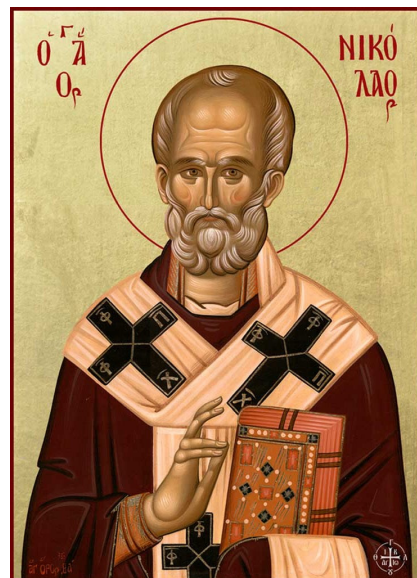
Wednesday, December 20 **St. Ignatios**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Thursday, December 21 Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Friday, December 22 **St. Anastasia**
Orthros 6:15 a.m. Divine Liturgy 7:00 a.m.
Royal Hours of the Nativity 9:30-11:00 a.m.

Saturday, December 23 Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

St. Nicholas– December 6



St. Spyridon– December 12



St. Anastasia– December 22



Continued...

Liturgical Schedule for December Cont. & January

Sunday, December 24 **Sunday Before Nativity**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Vigil of the Nativity
Great Vespers 4:00 p.m.
Orthros 5:30 p.m. Divine Liturgy 7:00 p.m.

Monday, December 25 **Nativity of Christ**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, December 30 **St. Anyisia**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 31 **Sunday Before Theophany**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, January 1, 2024 **St. Basil**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Thursday, January 4 Royal Hours of Theophany 9:30-11:00 a.m.

Friday, January 5 **Vespertal Divine Liturgy 9:00 a.m.**
Blessing of the Waters 10:15 a.m.

Saturday, January 6 **Theophany**
(St. Nicholas Cathedral in Tarpon Springs)
Orthros 8:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m.
Blessing of the Waters in Spring Bayou 12:00 p.m.

Great Vespers for Feast of St. John the Baptist 6:30 p.m.

Sunday, January 7 **St. John the Baptist**
Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.

St. John the Baptist– January 7



St. Anyisia– December 30



St. Basil– January 1



Liturgical Notes for December

Saturday, December 2 – St. Porphyrios of Kafsokalivia

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



Monday, December 4 - St. Barbara and St. John of Damascus

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

Wednesday, December 6 - St. Nicholas

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



Saturday, December 9 - St. Anna

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

Tuesday, December 12 - St. Spyridon

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

Wednesday, December 13 – Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary

We will continue to offer Paraklesis once a month, so that we can pray for all the members of our community by name, out loud. For December, the Paraklesis will be offered on Wednesday evening, December 13, from 6:00-7:00 p.m.



Friday, December 15 - St. Eleftherios

St. Eleftherios was a priest-martyr in the 2nd century of the church.

Monday, December 18 – St. Sebastian

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





Monday, December 18—Day of Prayer—Liturgy, Prayer, Candlelight Service

In past years, we opened our church for a quiet day of prayer a few days before the Nativity and this was well-received. So, we decided that we will take an entire day for quiet prayer, with two services as the bookends. On Monday, December 18, we will celebrate Divine Liturgy. After Liturgy, we will have the church open all day for quiet prayer. If you haven't been to church in a while and would like to stop in during the Christmas week, or if life is moving too fast and you just want to slow down for a few hours and come sit in the church, this day is for you.

Christmas Candlelight Service—There is a “canon” (a set of hymns) in preparation for the Nativity. It is very similar in order to the Paraklesis Service that we celebrate in August, except that the hymns are dedicated to the Feast of the Nativity and not to the Virgin Mary, though she is still mentioned prominently in many of them. The service includes the opportunity to pray for people by name, so bring your names and the names of anyone you know who needs prayer to this service. Also, included in this service will be an opportunity to pray for those who have passed away this year. At the end of the service, a Trisagion

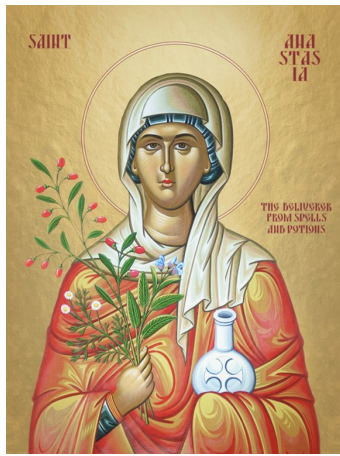


service will be chanted for all those who have passed away this year. If you know someone who can use some prayer this Nativity, or someone who has lost a loved one, or someone who is sad, please invite them to this service. Allow us to pray for them and their loved ones. The service will be done entirely in English. It will last just over an hour. It will be done only by candlelight. There will be no Communion at the service. So the challenges of a normal Sunday liturgy—length, no intercommunion, use of Greek—that challenge non-Orthodox visitors to our church will not be present. This is a wonderful opportunity there is in the year to invite non-Orthodox friends to our church. Finally, we will have a small dinner following the service, so that we can break bread together.



A Christmas “Holy Week”

We will celebrate the Divine Liturgy each day from December 17–December 25, so we can have additional opportunities to partake of Christ as we prepare for His Nativity. From Monday, December 18–Thursday, December 21, Divine Liturgy will be celebrated at 10:00 a.m., preceded by Orthros at 9:00 a.m. On Friday, December 22, Divine Liturgy will be celebrated at 7:00 a.m., preceded by Orthros at 6:15 a.m. We never offer the Divine Liturgy this early in the morning, and it will be a wonderful way to begin the day, to see the sunrise in the church. We will also celebrate Divine Liturgy on Saturday, December 23 at 10:00 a.m.



Friday, December 22 St. Anastasia

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

Friday, December 22 – Liturgy at Sunrise

On Friday, December 22, we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy at 7:00 a.m. (with Orthros at 6:15 a.m.) We rarely offer Divine Liturgy this early in the morning, and it will be a wonderful way to begin the day, to see the sunrise in the church.



Friday, December 22 - Royal Hours of Christmas 9:30-11:00 a.m.

The service of the Royal Hours consists of Prayers, Hymns, Psalms and Old Testament prophecies that foretell the coming of Christ on Christmas. Also read are the Gospel passages of the feast of Christmas. There is no Holy Communion at this service. Rather, it is a service of quiet meditation in anticipation of the Nativity. We will hold this service from 9:30-11:00 a.m. on Friday, December 22. We will celebrate the entire service by candlelight. This will be a wonderful and peaceful way to usher in the Feast of the Nativity. The service will be conducted in English.

Services for the Nativity – Sunday, December 24

We will celebrate Divine Liturgy as normal, on Sunday, December 24 at 10:00 a.m., preceded by Orthros at 9:00 a.m. It is hoped that those with young children and those who do not drive at night will take advantage of this morning Liturgy. Because December 24 is a Sunday, the order of service in the morning is called “Sunday Before the Nativity” and the hymns and Scripture readings reflect that. If you come to worship on Sunday morning, we hope that you will also either in the evening of the 24th or the morning of the 25th to the actual Nativity Divine Liturgy.



Vigil of the Nativity

A “vigil” in the Orthodox Church is where two or more services are connected in order to create a long period of worship. For the Nativity this year, we will hold such a “vigil.” You may attend some of all of it, come early and leave, or come only for the Divine Liturgy, whatever you wish.

Great Vespers of the Nativity—4:00 p.m.

The Vespers of the Nativity includes Old Testament Prophecy Readings, eight of them that begin with Genesis 1:1, the creation of the world, continue with readings from Isaiah and Jeremiah that have some of the more popular prophetic verses that foretell the coming of the Messiah. The sunset will occur during the Vespers service. This is traditional, as Vespers ends one day and begins another. With the setting of the sun, we will begin the feast of the Nativity.

Orthros of the Nativity—5:30 p.m.

Orthros is usually celebrated in the morning. It tells the story of a saint or feastday in hymns. The Orthros of the Nativity has dozens of hymns that tell the Biblical account of the Incarnation. During both the Vespers and Orthros, the church will be illumined only by candlelight.



Great Doxology—6:45 p.m.

The Feast of the Nativity marks the only time in human history that the night became brighter than day with the appearance of the multitude of angels. At 6:45 p.m. the choir will sing the Great Doxology, the hymn that ends nearly every Orthros service. We hear the choir sing this hymn on Sundays. It's the first hymn they sing. It is the hymn of the angels from the Nativity. How appropriate it will be to hear the Doxology on the feast of the Nativity, as the lights come on in our church and "night becomes like day."



The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great—7:00 p.m.

The centerpiece of our Nativity Feast is, of course, the Divine Liturgy. When the Nativity falls on a Sunday or Monday, we celebrate the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great as the Nativity Liturgy.

Monday, December 25 – Nativity of Christ

We will celebrate Divine Liturgy on Christmas morning. Since we are blessed now with more than one priest at the altar, we are able to celebrate additional Christmas Liturgies.

Thursday, December 30 - St. Anysia

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



WELCOME MINSITRY



Guide us to Thy Perfect Light!

We hope you are enjoying you're Guide us to Thy Perfect Light gift bag, filled with items to help prepare you for the upcoming celebration of the Birth of Christ! Included are some resources to help guide your spiritual path during this season: the daily desk calendar filled with prayers, daily scriptures, personal reflection points and family action items, a pamphlet on the Nativity, and the 2024 Archdiocesan calendar; seasonal items for you to use in your home: an ornament, small magnet, a votive candle, and a special letter to read on Christmas morning; and there are some useful, fun promotional items for you to proudly show off and use year round, too – a magnet, pen, post it notes – all with our own St. John logo! Our Welcome Ministry is so thankful for the many volunteers and efforts of all our ministry heads to offer this gift from our parish family. Please let the office know if you did not receive a bag, or you'd like an extra one to share with a family member, friend neighbor, coworker! During this season of the Nativity Fast, may we grow in Christ's love, both individually and as a community and experience the way to **Guide us to Thy Perfect Light!**

Christmas Prayer Request

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

Daughters of Penelope Alcmaeon 167 Tampa



Καλά Χριστούγεννα και Χρόνια πολλά!

The Daughters of Penelope wishes you Merry Christmas and many years filled with love, joy, health, peace, and prosperity!

Food Pantry Update

The St. John Food Pantry helps support our existing Ministry Food Drives along with Metropolitan Ministries, Feeding Tampa Bay, Bridge Prep and others in need!

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

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

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

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

Requested Food Pantry Items

- ◆ Canned fruits and vegetables
- ◆ Canned beans (all varieties)
- ◆ Canned Meat
(including Vienna sausage, spam, chicken, and tuna)
- ◆ Cans of soup
- ◆ Cereal/ Boxes of Milk
- ◆ Instant mashed potatoes
- ◆ Jell-O/Pudding
- ◆ Macaroni & cheese
- ◆ Oatmeal
- ◆ Pasta
- ◆ Peanut Butter & Jelly (in plastic jars)
- ◆ Ramen noodles
- ◆ Rice
- ◆ Spaghetti sauce
- ◆ Dry goods
- ◆ Paper towels
- ◆ Toilet paper



Sunday School News

Our topics for November were Communion-Liturgy-Worship and CHARITY - THANKFULNESS. The Sunday School also made cards and wrote wonderful messages to our military men and women. The children also helped the Philoptochos fill The Bags of Love for our less fortunate neighbors on Nov. 19th.

It was wonderful to see so many of our children participate in the Greek Festival. Our children were amazing dancers and worked so hard helping out in so many areas of the festival.

November 12th was our YOUTH SUNDAY SERVICE. Our children sang beautifully throughout this service. We would like to thank them and our High School Student who did a great job reading the Epistle. The parishioners of St. John's are truly blessed to have such wonderful young stewards.

Our SUNDAY SCHOOL CHRISTMAS PAGEANT will take place on December 17th. We hope you enjoy this year's Christmas Pageant. The SUNDAY SCHOOL- HOPE AND JOY Christmas Party and PAGEANT REHEARSAL will take place on Saturday, Dec. 16th.

DECEMBER CALENDAR:

Sunday, December 3rd: Topic: Stewardship

Sunday, December 10th: Topic: The Nativity

Saturday, December 16th: Sunday School Christmas Party and Pageant Rehearsal

Sunday, December 17th: Sunday School Christmas Program

Sunday, December 24th and 31st: No Sunday School Classes

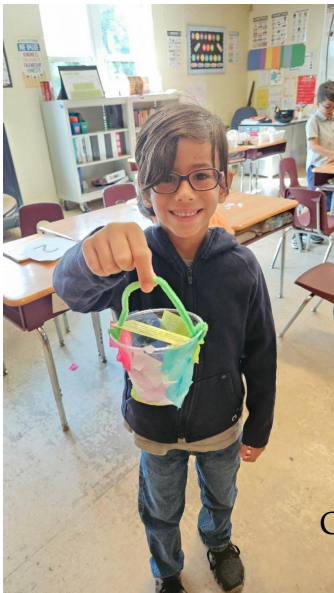


Our 1st Graders are proud to show everyone their projects.



Sunday School News Cont.

Kindergarteners working on their projects



One of our 1st Grade Projects!



Our 5TH Graders made pumpkins comparing Christianity to Carving a Pumpkin.

Kindergarten with the Church Vessels.
Future Altar Boys and Priests



Our 6th Graders are proud to show everyone
their cards.



Our 5th Graders with their cards.





December Philoptochos NEWS

.....
DECEMBER 10 & 17

Annual Christmas
Spanakopita, Tiropita & Vasiloptia Sale
See Lisa Alsina for more information
.....

.....
TURKEY GIFT CARDS

We are collecting \$15 grocery store gift cards for the Sunday School & Joy/Hope Metropolitan Ministries food drive. Please help! See Katherine Sakkis or Pres. Denise.
.....

.....
THANK YOU

- To all who participated in or donated to the Breast Cancer Walk. We raised over \$1000 for breast cancer research! Thank you to our chairs, Vivian Samuel and Georgia Kane.
- To all who helped package and distribute our Bags of Love to the homeless. We were able to provide 60 bags. Thank you to chair Lisa Alsina.

Memorial & Kolyva Protocol

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

TWELVE DISCIPLES PROGRAM

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks;

for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." I Thessalonians 5:16-18

At the time, Jesus said, "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my Yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Matthew 11: 27-30 (Gospel on the Feast of St. Savas)

"A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices!" These are the lyrics to a well-known Christmas carol, "O Holy Night." Certain translations of today's Gospel passage translate the passage "all who labor and are heavy laden," (Matthew 11:28) as "all who work and who are weary." This Gospel lesson always makes me (Fr. Stavros) think of this Christmas carol, which is why it is appropriate that this Gospel is read every year on December 5 (and on other days when we commemorate ascetics in the church). This year it seems that many of us are especially weary, not only from our jobs, caring for our families, and trying to touch all the bases in life. We are also weary of the Middle East Unrest, societal social unrest, the never-ending news cycle, politics, and the uncertainty that have marked this year as the most stressful ever, for some of us. Published by Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis on December 5, 2022, St. John's Prayer Team

<https://myocn.net/st-savas-the-sanctified/>

St. Savva knew that Christ and Prayer offer everyone "a thrill of hope and a reason for the weary world to rejoice..." Pray daily. To assist you, St. John offers the Twelve Disciples Project. St. Savas the Sanctified-December 5

Prayer Warriors-Twelve Disciples Project

Father Stavros prays for all twelve pages of compiled names representing the entire St John the Baptist membership at each service but specifically at each Paraklesis.

Thinking that praying for members of our community should not be the responsibility of the Priest alone, in August 2020, we started a program called "The 12 Disciples." The names of all St. John members are sorted onto 12 pages. The individual pages are divided and distributed between interested individuals that are referred to as Prayer Warriors (disciples). The idea is for each "disciple" or "warrior" to take one or more pages of names and pray for the entire group of people every day.

Each page, along with a page that includes the Trisagion prayer, is distributed to each Disciple monthly.

We currently have nearly 50 "disciples", meaning that each person in this community is being prayed for by at least four people every day.

Participating requires no special talent, no physical ability, no financial investment but only a desire to offer up prayerful love for your fellow parishioners. As Father Stavros admonished us in a recent Prayer Team message, "We (all) need time to be in the presence of the Son of God."

If you'd like to participate (to enjoy the presence of God!) and receive at least one page of names to pray for, please contact the church office or Mathew Balasis, 727-345-4855 (mathewbalasis@verizon.net).

"With the rivers of your tears you made the barren desert bloom; and with your sighs from deep within, you made your labors bear their fruits a hundredfold; and you became a star, illuminating the world by your miracles, O Savas, our devout father. Intercede with Christ our God, for the salvation of our souls." (Apolytikion of St. Savas, Translated by Fr. Seraphim Dedes)



Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 4,097 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 6 years! Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email Vasili at Vasili@stjohntpa.org and ask him to add you. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email Vasili or follow the link at the bottom of the daily emails to do so. If you want to forward to a friend, please use the “forward to a friend” option.

Also, make sure prayerteam365@gmail.com has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.

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

Father Stavros has authored NINE books that are available both in the bookstore and online. They are entitled:

Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections on Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany

The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection

Blessed is the Kingdom, Now and Forever: Reflections on the Divine Liturgy

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

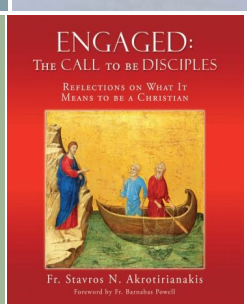
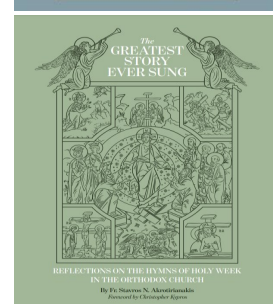
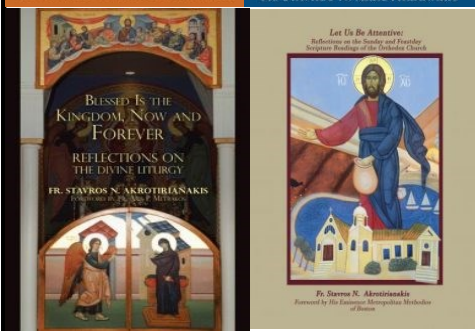
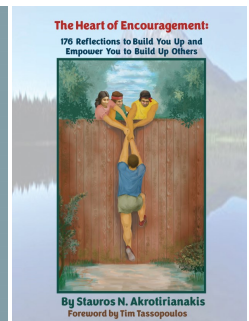
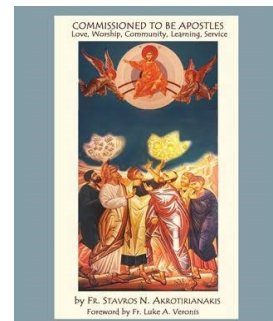
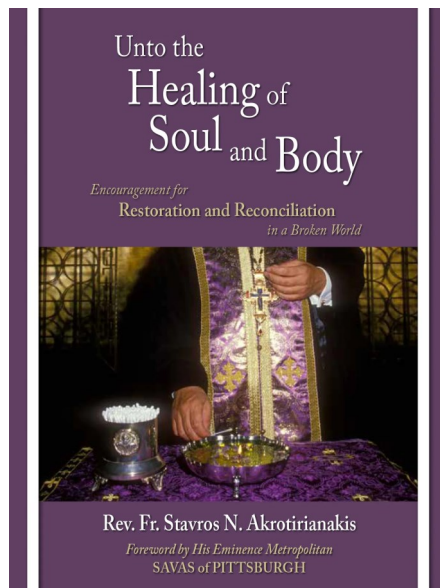
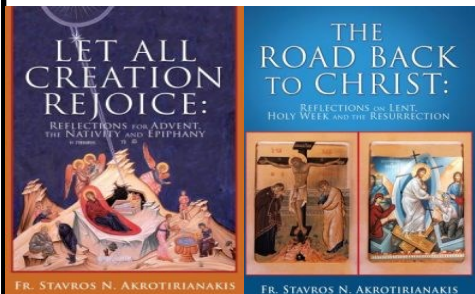
Engaged: The Call To Be Disciples, Reflections on What it Means to be a Christian

Commissioned to be Apostles: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

The Heart of Encouragement: 176 Reflections to Build You Up and Empower You to Build Up Others

The Greatest Story Ever Sung: Reflections on the Hymns of Holy Week In the Orthodox Church

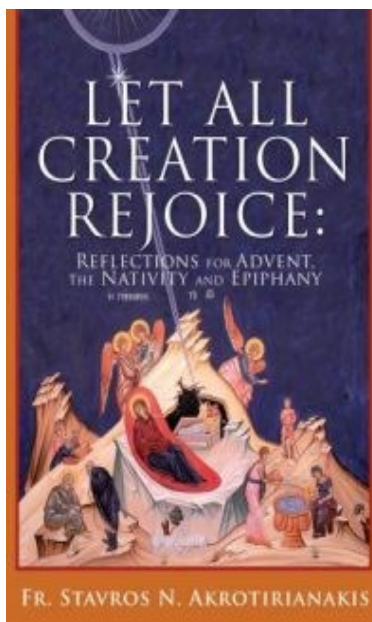
NEW: Unto the Healing of Soul and Body: Encouragement for Restoration and Reconciliation in a Broken World



Start Your 2023 Advent Journey with “Let All Creation Rejoice”

Advent every year begins on November 15 and goes until January 7

As we go through the season of Advent, I wanted to share with you a book I have written called, *Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections for Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany*. The book is approximately 230 pages long. It contains a reflection to be read daily during the period of the Nativity Fast (November 15) through January 7. From November 15 through December 24, one verse of the Gospel accounts of the Nativity is examined in detail each day. It is practical inspiration written to be understood by the average Greek Orthodox Christian. +Fr. Stavros



Although this book is written in an easy to read style - the concepts and application are very thought provoking! My husband and I have been reading it at meal time, as our Advent meditation. Each day's readings help me turn my mind to what's really going on and important this time of year - helping me refocus, and reflect on the events surrounding the Nativity, and what they mean for me! To-day's reading, for example, reflected on the angel telling the shepherds, "Don't be afraid," and following reflections on fear in my own life. Excellent book, and now that I am enjoying this one so much, I will be ordering the Lenten reflections, too. -Amazon Customer

A must read for any Christian wishing to renew their spiritual life during the Christ-mas season. - Amazon Customer

Parish Registry

Wedding-Nick Fortino and Cynthia Lampos were married on Saturday, October 14. Steven Lampos was the Koumbaro. Congratulations!

Wedding-John Gemmellaro and Jennifer Alastanos were married on Saturday, October 21. Tiffany Alastanos was the Koumbara. Congratulations!

Funeral-Presbytera Loretta Karpelenia passed away on November 6. Her funeral was held on November 13. May her memory be eternal!

Condolences to Magda Myer on the passing of her son, John, on October 9. May his memory be eternal!

Condolences to Alex DeMaio on the passing of her mother, Sylvia Michos. May her memory be eternal!

Condolences to the family of Peter Antoniou, who passed away on October 29. May his memory be eternal!

Condolences to Amalia Stefanou on the passing of her mother, Joanne Stefanou, on Wednesday, November 8.

Community Outreach

Metropolitan Ministries Holiday Tent 2023

2609 N Rome Ave, Tampa, FL 33607

St John the Baptist GOC is responsible for 12 volunteers for both a Christmas event.

Below are the dates, times and sign up website for St John the Baptist GOC.

It is imperative that each St John volunteer pre-registers for this opportunity as any unfilled slots are released 2 weeks prior to our scheduled dates.

Christmas Holiday: Thursday, December 21 - 2:00 to 6:00 PM

Sign– up at : <https://metromin.volunteerhub.com/vv2/lp/stjohngreekorthodox/>

YOUTH PROTECTION PROGRAM REMINDER:

It's that time again . . . time to register with the Youth Protection Program! Our child and youth ministries will be starting up soon and the ministry heads will need your assistance with meetings and events. Would you like to help out? Great! But first you must register with the new Youth Protection Program, get screened, and do a training module before you can help your favorite child/youth ministry. To get started, please contact Suzanne Pileggi at smpileggi1@gmail.com or (813) 244-5855. Thank you!



St. John's Bookstore Christmas Shop



Young at Heart News

Our November gathering was a wonderful opportunity to give thanks to God for the gift of friendship and love. Our dinner and fellowship brought us together to discuss the many reasons we have to be thankful. December 9th is the date of our next gathering. A potluck meal, gift exchange, and program are planned. Please join us and experience the joy of the season. For more information, contact Dora Morgan, Diane Trimis, or Presvytera Denise

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

Have a Joyous Nativity and a New Year filled with God's richest blessings!

Presvytera Denise and Elaina – Your Bookstore Staff



St. John the Baptist Community News

Monday night Bible study with Fr. John

Will continue meeting at 6:30 p.m. on most Monday 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 December, the dates are

Monday, December 4 and Monday, December 11. Bible Study will then resume on Monday, January 8.

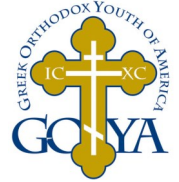


Women's Bible Study

Our Tuesday morning women's meets most Tuesdays from 10:00-11:30 a.m. in person or on zoom. We are studying I Peter this year. For December, the dates are Tuesday, December 5; and Monday, December 11. Then we will be on a break, resuming on Tuesday, January 9.

GOYA

The GOYA Meeting for December will be Sunday, December 3. We will meet for an afternoon of skating and laser tag at the TGH Ice Plex, 10222 Elizabeth Place in Tampa. We will meet from 1:30-4:00 p.m. Lunch, skating and laser tag are included in the admission price of \$20.



Men's Group

Our men's group will meet on Sunday, December 17, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Any men of our community are welcome to join us for dinner, discussion. We meet at 5:00 p.m., walk to a local restaurant and get some food, then bring it back to the hall where we eat and have a discussion. Our topic for December will be "Keeping Christ in Christmas." Please mark down our dates for men's group for this academic year—Sunday, January 28; Sunday, March 3; and Sunday, April 14.

Save the Date—Men's Retreat—Saturday, February 10—Men's Retreat for Orthodox Men of the Tampa Bay Area.

Young Adult Dinner/Discussion-Thursday, December 7

Our young adult group meets once a month for dinner/discussion (and other times for fellowship and service). The meeting for December will be on Thursday, December 7, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. All young adults, ages 18-40, are invited to participate. We will be having a monthly discussion based on some set topics. The Topic for December is “Keeping Christ in Christmas—The Nativity and Why It Matters.” Group Members use What’s App for communication. Please contact Aris Rogers to be added to our what’s app for young adults at 813-309-5525.

Sunday school Christmas program

December 17-Following the Divine Liturgy on December 17, our Sunday school children will again present a Christmas program for us.

Parish Council Elections

December 10—Parish Council Elections will be held on Sunday, December 10 following the Divine Liturgy from 12 p.m.– 1 p.m., in the Kourmolis Center.

Recognition of Veterans on Sunday, November 12

On Sunday, November 12, we recognized our Veterans at St. John. We dedicated a flag display that was installed in the Kourmolis Center. God bless our Veterans. We thank you!

College Student Night

We will be having our annual College Student Night on Tuesday, December 19, beginning at 6:00 p.m. We will have dinner and discussion. All college students are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please RSVP to Fr. Stavros by December 15 if you plan to attend.



St John needs all hands on deck for Gasparilla on January 27!

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

To run this event, we are asking for your help once more!

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



FIFTY- TWO VERSES IN FIFTY- TWO WEEKS



THE BIBLE PROJECT
BY FR. STAVROS

May God bring good things into your life everyday.



Most of us don't spend enough time in the Bible. Sadly, some of us don't spend any time. Each week since January 2019, we provide in The Messenger and then repeated weekly in the bulletin, a verse or two. I choose verses that are meaningful to me, or well known or ones that have meaning in contemporary times. You are welcome to submit verses via email to me as well, as many of you have. If you want a challenge, do the following:

- Memorize the verse of the week.
- For a greater challenge, read the entire chapter of the book that the verse comes from.
- For a greater challenge, read the entire book where the verse comes from.

Another challenge to consider is to keep a journal, read it, memorize it and contemplate the verse each week. Allow the Holy Spirit to move your mind and your thoughts and then write down those thoughts and keep them in a journal. If you do one reflection on Scripture each week, you will have the best book that could be. A book written by you, for you, guided by the Holy Spirit, who will guide your thoughts as you read the Scriptures.

Below are verses for the month of December. There is one verse for each week. I have written a few comments below each verse to get your mind going. Don't let my thoughts be your interpretation. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you through your reflection on Scripture. If you have any favorite verse you'd like me to comment on, please forward it to frstav@gmail.com.



December 3-9

I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice."

Genesis 22:17-18

The entire story of the New Testament is foreshadowed in the Old Testament. This month's verses will focus on the Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled in the New Testament in the person of Jesus Christ. In Genesis, the Lord makes a covenant with Abraham. Of all the people in the world, God chooses Abraham and tells him that He will multiply his descendants as the stars of heaven and the sand which is on the seashore. This is why the Jewish people are called "the chosen people" because of all the people in the world, God chose Abraham and his descendants and Christ descends from that line. We will read on the Sunday before the Nativity about 42 generations beginning with Abraham and ending with Christ. As for Abraham's part in the covenant, he was called to trust God, to leave his home of Ur of the Chaldeans and go to the Land of Canaan, in what is today Israel. The covenant is enhanced with the coming of Jesus Christ. We, the Christians, are not Jewish, we are Christian, but we are descended from the line of Abraham as well. The Jews were waiting in anticipation of the Messiah, and they are still waiting. The Christians are those who have recognized Christ as the Messiah, the promised one of the Old Testament. But we are all, in essence, descended from the line of Abraham.

Continued...

December 10-16

But you, O Bethlehem Ephratha, who are little among the clans of Judah, for you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

Micah 5:2

No specific details were given as to the date that the Messiah would come. But there were definitely many clues given about Him. Just like now, we also live in an age of expectation as we await the Second Coming of Christ. And there have been signs given in the New Testament as for how this will occur, but no mention of when it will occur. The “when” issue is where faith comes in. If we KNOW something is coming and exactly when and how, there is no faith needed. We are promised something is coming and we are to wait in faith that it will happen as the Lord has said it will happen. Back to the Old Testament, God told His people many things about the coming of the Messiah that were fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. And in Micah, the prophet (inspired by God) writes that the place where the “ruler” will come from is Bethlehem. I think of the prophecies like a puzzle. All the pieces were there that pointed to Christ as the Messiah. Throughout the Old Testament, pieces were revealed and assembled and then completed in the Incarnation of Christ. Thus, the Nativity story (and the Resurrection and other things about Jesus) are not told in one narrative, but in “crumbs” that are placed throughout the Old Testament. The obscure book of Micah (and it’s obscure to us, but was known to the religious leaders of two thousand years ago) reveals the place, Bethlehem, where the Messiah would come from. Those who would recognize Jesus as the Christ would know that He was born in Bethlehem, they would have recognized that this prophecy would have come true.

December 17-23

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

Isaiah 11:1-3

Everyone has a family. In fact, when we meet someone, often the first information that is exchanged is where we come from, our family of origin and our place of origin. That’s why it is important that Jesus didn’t just “appear” as a 30-year-old adult but that He had a family. His family of origin is from the line of Abraham, through Jesse, to David and all his descendants. Jesus would not be just any person though. He would have the Spirit of the Lord on Him, wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and fear of the Lord. Thus, the Messiah was described, what He would be like, so that when Christ appeared, and acted in a certain way, people would have been expecting that as well.

December 24-30

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel.

Isaiah 7:14

The birth of the Messiah would take place in a way that no other birth had ever occurred. Rather than be between a man and woman, the Messiah would be conceived in a woman but by the Holy Spirit. The woman would be a virgin. Obviously, this was not announced to the world, that Mary was a virgin. Joseph would have known that, as he would also certainly have known the prophecy that this would happen. The Messiah was going to be male, a son, and His name would be Emmanuel, which means “God with us.” As we celebrate the Nativity this week, it is good to ask ourselves if we identify with this concept of “Emmanuel,” do we feel that God is with us, why or why not? And do we act like an “Emmanuel”, that God is with us, in us, working through us?

December 31-January 6

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I have called my son.

Hosea 11:1

One time, I took a room full of 100 people and said “I’m looking for a specific person in this room, anyone know who I am looking for?” And of course no one knew. Then I said, “It’s a male.” Now there were 50 people left. I asked again, “Anyone know who the special person is?” And again, no one knew, there were still 50 choices. Next, I said “he is a doctor.” So 40 of the 50 men sat down. Only ten left. And still no one knew who I was talking about. Then I said, “the doctor’s name is John.” Eight of the ten sat down, so now it was down to 2. Then I said “John has two children.” One of the two doctors named John was unmarried. So that made it obvious who I was talking about. And this happened in only 4 steps, to go from 100 people to one special person. The Old Testament has between 225 and 450 prophecies about Jesus, depending on which Bible scholar you study. So there are between 225 and 450 things that are unique about Jesus. We see that in four easy steps, we can identify one person out of 100. Someone with 225 specific things about them would be unique for the entire history of the world. And that’s one reason why Jesus is the Christ. There were 225-450 things that would be fulfilled in the person who is the Messiah. One of them was that He would be called out of Egypt. And we know that Jesus went to Egypt to avoid the slaughter of innocents by Herod, and then when Herod died, Jesus was called out of Egypt back to Israel. Two hundred twenty-five is actually an overwhelming number of unique things about one person, and it is another indication that the man named Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah. And it one other reason to study the Prophecies of the Old Testament, which are confirmed in the New Testament, and to believe the “prophecies” of the New Testament which are being fulfilled in our time and will continue to be fulfilled until the Second Coming of Christ. How could anyone miss 225 signs you might ask? Well, how are we still missing the many signs of things that Christ said will be fulfilled in our time? Keep studying, learning and showing up. It’s all there and is all true.

Hope Joy Fall Festival 2023





We Will Serve the Lord

*Our word for our parish for 2023 is “serve.” Every month this year, an article about service will appear. During some months, the article will be written by one of our ministry heads, talking about how their ministry serves and why they serve in it. **This month’s article is about our Sunday School.***

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Joshua 24:15

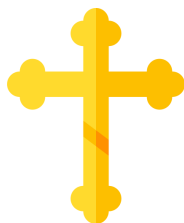
Continued...

ST. JOHN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

I am honored to share why our Sunday School Ministry at St. John's is so important to me. I am Vickie Peckham and I have taught Sunday School for over 25 years. I have also served as the director for well over ten years. When Father Stavros asked me to serve as director, I told him that I couldn't give up teaching the children, which is truly my calling. As a result, I have continued to teach the 5th graders for many years.

As Joshua 24:15 states, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." I am so grateful to serve the Lord by inspiring our children to have a personal relationship with Christ. Our Sunday School word is "INSPIRE" and all of our dedicated teachers strive to inspire our students to learn and grow in our Orthodox faith. I know I do.

In Mark 10:14-16, Jesus tells his disciples, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God." Jesus loves our children dearly. I truly love our Sunday School students and they are very dear to me. Sunday is my favorite day of the week because of the Divine Liturgy, receiving Holy Communion, and teaching Sunday School. Being with students who are so eager to learn, have the biggest smiles on their faces, and have great questions and comments, just warms my heart tremendously. Teaching Sunday School is truly a gift to me and I hope I am giving a gift to my students. I am always humbled to serve our Lord in this ministry.



Children are the future of the church and our society. If I can play a small part in helping them to become closer to God and better Christians, I have done my job. Parents have a more important role in this development because they are with them everyday. Children look up to their parents and will model their behaviors as they grow older. Not only what their parents say, but also what they do. Parents are the most important teachers of their children and I pray that they are doing their part in the education of our faith.

In closing, I would like to thank our many teachers who dedicate so much of their time and talents to serve our Lord and the children in this ministry. Their commitment makes my role as director so much easier. I am so grateful to them, the children, the parents, Fr. Stavros, our congregation, and especially our LORD!



Thank You to all of Our Friends!

Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL
Demet & Eleni Anagnostiadis - Bethesda, MD
Nicholas & Doris Andreadakis - Lititz, PA
Andy Apostolopoulos—Asheville, NC
George & Maria Andros - Birmingham, AL
Nicholas Anton - Dunedin, FL
Gaby & Alicia Atik - Treasure Island, FL
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL
Richard & Mickie Bass - Lynchburg, VA
Katherine Beasley - Vero Beach, FL
Christopher & Jaime Brewer - Tampa, FL
Pete & Carol Caldwell - Ringgold, GA
William Camarinos - Alexandria, VA
William & Kanella Jane Chapman - Ellenton, FL
Nicholas & Sondra Chronis - Mt. Pleasant, SC
Emmanuel Chrysakis - Palm Harbor, FL
Victor & Cynthia Cucuz - Tampa, FL
Fr Stratton & Pres. Denise Dorozenski - Sterling Heights, MI
Eric & Artemis Mellen - Longwood, FL
Peter George - Tampa, FL
Ron & Maria Gregory - St. Petersburg, FL
Charlie & Eleftheria Hambos - Orlando, FL
Gabriel Hurst - Largo, FL
Michael Ibrahim - E. Brunswick, NJ
Judith Jogerst

Constantine Kallenekos - Tampa, FL
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL
Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL
Demitrius & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH
John & Cathie Koch - New Port Richey, FL
Tommy Kolouris - Tampa, FL
Sharon Kush - Tallahassee, FL
Evangelos & Helen Liras - Tampa, FL
Fr Michael & Pres Virginia Massouh - Seminole, FL
Kathleen Spanos Mendez - Ponte Verda, FL
Charles Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA
Kay Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA
Basil & Dorothy Nosal - Fredericksburg, VA
John & Deanna Palmer - Greenville, SC
Theodora Pappas Poletis - Nottingham, MD
Luke & Arianna Quinn - Arlington, MA
Nadine Raheb
Pericles & Fotini Stamatiades - Asheville, NC
Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI
Lillian Thomas - Dyer, IN
Wesley & Melisa Thompson - Clearwater, FL
Christopher & Georgette Tsavoussis - Dunedin, FL
William Yotis - La Grange, IL
Sharon Colonis- Vero Beach, FL

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.**

Nursing Ministry

Fall Prevention in the Home



It is estimated that every one in four Americans aged 65+ takes a fall every year in the United States (Centers for Disease Control). This number is significant considering that falls can be detrimental to the health, safety, and financial independence of the individual. The good news is that with increased awareness surrounding this issue both individuals and their loved ones can contribute to reducing the risk of falling and the serious impacts that may follow.

Falls are a leading cause of injury and death in the home, especially for older adults. Most falls can be avoided by using the following tips:

Make your home safe in the bathroom

- Install grab bars in the tub and around the toilet
- Use a non-skid shower mat
- Use a handheld shower head
- Install a raised toilet seat
- Use a shower bench to sit while showering and drying
- In a sitting position, dry your feet before getting out of the tub or shower
- Sit to shave, apply makeup or fix your hair
- Use a urinal or bedside commode if you have problems with urination or diarrhea that cause you to rush

In the living room

- No throw rugs or area rugs
- Remove cords and clutter from walkways
- Use furniture with firm cushions and arms to help you get up safely
- ♦ Make walkways wider

In the bedroom

- No throw rugs or area rugs
- Turn on the light before getting out of bed in the dark
- Sit for a minute at the edge of the bed before getting up
- Sit while dressing
- Use equipment to help with dressing
- Make sure bed covers do not drag on the floor

In the kitchen

- Put commonly used items in easy to reach places
- Slide heavy objects along counter top to avoid carrying
- Use a cart to move heavy items
- Use kitchen chairs that don't have wheels
- No throw rugs
- Use a kitchen timer to avoid unnecessary trips to check food
- Stairs
 - Use handrails; install handrails on both sides if possible
 - Install light switch at the top and bottom of the staircase
 - Place bright colored tape at the edge of each step
- Install a non-skid surface on each step
- Remove all clutter

Continued general information and educational

Night lights

- Make sure a light switch is at the entry of every room
- Use an automatic light timer to avoid walking into a dark house
- Try to use glare-free light bulbs Outdoors and entries
- Walkways are free of clutter
- Walkways and entrances are well lit and salted during ice/snow
- Steps have railings and lighting
- ♦ Consider motion sensors

Medication

- Keep a current list of all medications with you at all times
- Ask your doctor to review the list at every visit
- Know the purpose and possible side effects of medications
- Some medications can make you dizzy or lose your balance



Stay active

Staying active is one of the most important ways to stay strong, keep your balance and lower your chances of falling.

- Lack of exercise can lead to weakness and problems with walking
- Use shoes that fit well and have non-slip soles
- Use a cane or walker as instructed by a therapist
- Be careful of ice and bad weather

Other hints

- See your doctor if you fall or feel unsteady when you walk. The doctor may recommend physical therapy to help prevent falls.
- Be sure your clothing fits well and does not cause you to trip
- Be sure to wear your glasses
- Have your eyes checked regularly
- Drinking alcohol may make your balance worse
- Increase the number of phones in the house
- Keep a cordless phone with you
- Do not rush
- Never use a chair as a step stool
- Clean up spills
- Carry small, light loads
- Consider a Lifeline or other emergency alert system



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.

Have questions?
Just need to talk?
Worried? Sad? Happy?
We are here for you!



Fr. John
678-637-4425 >

Fr. Stavros
< 813-394-1038



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.

WELCOME TO OUR PARISH

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

PLEASE TEXT THE WORD

"WELCOME" TO 813-790-5950

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

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

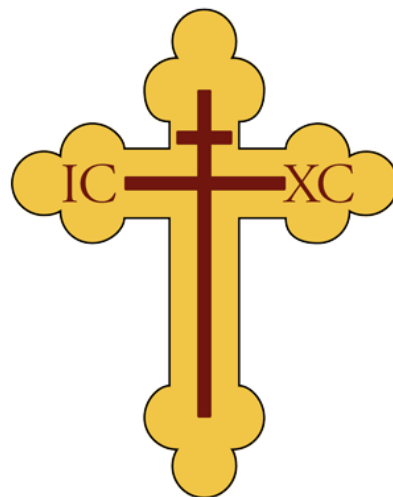
MY HOLIDAY SHOPPING LIST	MY HUSBAND'S HOLIDAY SHOPPING LIST
-Kid 1	
-Kid 2	
-Kid 3	
-Mom	
-Dad	
-Sister	
-Brother	
-Teacher 1	
-Teacher 2	
-Neighbor 1	
-Neighbor 2	
-Niece's/Nephew's	
-In-laws	
-Secret Santa (wk)	
-Husband	-Wife

Hip2Save



Pictures

GOYA Lock-In October 21

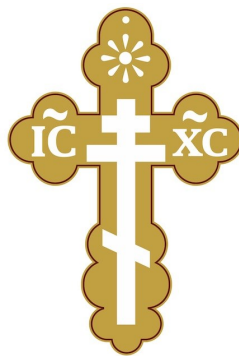


St. James Liturgy– Oct. 23

Celebrated with Fr. Harry Linsinbigler and
Fr. Kyriakos Hambos



Greek Festival Pictures 2023



Greek Festival Pictures 2023 Cont.



Greek Festival Pictures 2023 Cont.



Greek Festival Pictures 2023 Cont.



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stjohntpa.org

2418 W. Swann Avenue
Tampa, FL 33609

(813)876-8830



St. John is responsible to have 6 volunteers sign up each month.

Have a heart, lend a hand, and make a difference.

Sign Up



COMMUNITY OUTREACH 2023

OUR SCHEDULE FOR THE REMAINING MONTHS OF 2023 IS AS FOLLOWS:

SATURDAY

DECEMBER 16.

TIME: 8:00 AM - 10 AM

PLACE: TAMPA HOPE

3704 E. 3RD AVENUE

TAMPA, FL. 33605



Sign up via SIGNUP GENIUS

◀ Nov 2023	December 2023					Jan 2024 ▶
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
**Fast Day					1 **	2 ** St. Porphyrios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Children's Greek School
3 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. GOYA Christmas Card GOYA 1:30 p.m. Philoptochos Membership Christmas Brunch 12-3pm	4 ** St. Barbara Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	5 ** Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	6 ** St. Nicholas Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Choir Practice	7 ** Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m. Young Adult Discussion 6:30 p.m.	8 ** Kenny Kidd appt with Fr. Stavros	9 ** St. Anna Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Young at Heart Children's Greek School
10 ** Orthros 8:20 a.m. Liturgy 9:45 a.m. GOYA Christmas Card Parish Council Elections Philoptochos bake sale	11 ** Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	12 ** St. Spyridon Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	13 ** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m. Choir Practice	14 ** Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	15 ** St. Eletherios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	16 ** Community Outreach Sunday school Christmas program practice/retreat 11:00 a.m.
17 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Sunday School Christmas Program Philoptochos bake sale Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	18 ** Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Christmas Candlelight Service 6:00 p.m.	19 ** Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. College Student Discussion 6:00 p.m.	20 ** St. Ignatios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Choir Practice	21 ** Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	22 ** St. Anastasia Orthros 6:00 a.m. Liturgy 7:00 a.m. Royal Hours 9:30 a.m.	23 ** Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
24 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. No Sunday School Vespers 4:00 p.m. Orthros 5:30 p.m. Liturgy 7:00 p.m.	25 Nativity of Christ Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Office Closed	26 No Fasting until 1/5 Office Closed	27	28	29	30 St. Anyasia Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
31 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. No Sunday School Philoptochos Vasilopita Sale						

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As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "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