

The Desert



Messenger

"Behold, I send My messenger before Your Face, who shall prepare Your way..." (Matthew 11:10)

Volume 21, Issue 2 St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Las Vegas, NV

February 2023

**From
Father
John**

Beloved in Christ:

On *February 2*, the Holy Orthodox Church celebrates the Great Feast of *the Meeting of Our Lord in the Temple*. This event was recorded by the Holy Evangelist Luke and recounts when on the fortieth day after the birth in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and Righteous Joseph brought the Holy Infant into the Temple for a blessing, according to the Mosaic Law. Our Lord was received into the arms of the Elder Simeon – a practice we continue still today in the Orthodox Church with the Forty Day Blessing of Infants by the Priest. In accordance with the Law, Mary and Joseph – who because of their poverty were unable to bring an unblemished lamb to the Temple – made an offering of two turtledoves or pigeons for sacrifice (*Luke 2:24; Leviticus 12*) – yet by offering the Christ Child, they indeed fulfilled the Law by presenting Simeon with *"the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world."* (*John 1:29*) Having received consolation through encountering the Lord, St. Simeon blessed God, saying, *"Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace . . . for my eyes have seen Your salvation . . ."* (*Luke 2:28-32*)



One of the hymns for this feast draws the parallel between the Elder Simeon and the Prophet Isaiah: *"Isaiah was cleansed by receiving the coal from the Seraphim," cried the old man to the Mother of God. 'You fill me with light as you entrust to me, with your hands as with tongs, Him Whom you hold, Lord of light Who knows no evening and King of peace.'*" (*Orthros, Canticle Five; Isaiah 6:6*) While Isaiah received the type of the Holy Fire, Simeon received the fulfillment when he encountered Jesus Christ – as we likewise do when we partake of the Holy Eucharist, which upon touching our lips, takes away our guilt and remits our sins. (*Isaiah 6:7*) Just as the Elder received his consolation – indeed, the consolation of all humanity – in meeting Christ, it is the Office of the Holy Priesthood which allows us to encounter and remain united with Him in the life of the Church, and most especially in the Holy Mysteries.

This year in our beloved Parish of St. John the Baptist, we conclude the week during which we celebrate this Great Feast with the *Ordination of Florin Ioan Ristache by the hands of His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos – to the Holy Diaconate on February 4 and to the Holy Priesthood on February 5*. The Sacrament of Holy Ordination is also referenced in Isaiah's vision, when the Lord asked, *"Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?"* And the Prophet answered faithfully, *"Here am I! Send me!"* (*Isaiah 6:8*) Like the Prophet Isaiah, Florin has enthusiastically answered the Divine Call of Christ, the Great High Priest, to serve God and His Holy Church. Like the Elder Simeon, Florin encountered the Lord from an early age while serving with his father (who was a priest) in the Holy Altar in Romania, but his initial desire did not end there. From his youth, Florin has devoted nearly two decades, and lived in new countries, to nurture a deeper understanding of Holy Scriptures, Orthodox Theology, our Liturgical Tradition, and the Church Fathers – and more recently in our Parish as a Pastoral Assistant overseeing our Youth and Adult Ministries and assisting in the Divine Services – all in preparation for his Ordination. His wife, Alexandra, has not only supported his response to the Lord's Call, but moreover, has become an active partner in prayer, worship and assisting his service in the Church.

(Continued on Page 3)

WORSHIP SCHEDULE

*Sundays: 8:45 am Orthros ~ 10:00 am Divine Liturgy
Church School follows Holy Communion (Except February 5 and 19)*

*All our Sunday Divine Services are Available on Live-Stream!
Access the Live-Stream on <http://youtube.com/vegasgreekorthodox>*

Thursday, February 2/*The Meeting of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the Temple*

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy

Epistle: Hebrews 7:7-17

Gospel: Luke 2:22-40

Saturday, February 4/*St. Isidore of Pelusim, St. Nicholas the Confessor*

ORDINATION OF FLORIN RISTACHE TO THE HOLY DIACONATE

9:00 am Orthros

10:00 am Hierarchical Divine Liturgy with His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos

Epistle: 2 Timothy 2:11-19

Gospel: Luke 18:2-8

Ordination Brunch

5:00 pm Great Vespers

Sunday, February 5/*Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee/Triodion Begins/Holy Martyr Agatha/St. Polyevktos, Patriarch of Constantinople*

ORDINATION OF FLORIN RISTACHE TO THE HOLY PRIESTHOOD

8:45 am Orthros

10:00 am Hierarchical Divine Liturgy with His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos

Orthros: First Tone

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): Matthew 28:16-20

Epistle: 2 Timothy 3:10-15

Gospel: Luke 18:10-14

Ordination Luncheon (by pre-payment)

Triodion Begins: No Fasting This Week

Friday, February 10/*Holy Hieromartyr Haralambos*

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Artoclasia

Epistle: 2 Timothy 2:1-10

Gospel: John 15:17-27; 16:1-2

Sunday, February 12/*Sunday of the Prodigal Son/St. Meletios, Archbishop of Antioch/St. Antonios, Archbishop of Constantinople*

Orthros: Second Tone

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): Mark 16:1-8

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Gospel: Luke 15:11-32

Memorials: Alexis Josephs Kyprianou (40 Days); Chris Dimopoulos (5 years)

Fellowship: FDF Preview Luncheon

Fast on Wednesday and Friday

Saturday, February 18/*First Saturday of Souls/St. Leo, Pope of Rome/Holy Confessors Agapetos of Sinai and Flavian, Patriarch of Constantinople*

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial

Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

Gospel: Luke 21:8-9, 25-27, 33-36

Sunday, February 19/*Meatfare Sunday/The Last Judgment/Holy Apostles of the Seventy, Philemon, Apphia, Archippos, and Onesimos/Holy Marytr Philothea of Athens*

Orthros: Third Tone

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): Mark 16:9-20

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 8:8-13; 9:1-2

Gospel: Matthew 25: 31-46

Fellowship: Nikki Kanelos

Abstain from Meat This Week

Saturday, February 25/*Second Saturday of Souls/St. Tarasios, Patriarch of Constantinople/St. Reginos, Bishop of Skopelos*

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial

Epistle: Galatians 5:22-26; 6:1-2

Gospel: Matthew 6:1-13

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Worship Schedule (Continued from Page 2)

Sunday, February 26/*Cheesefare Sunday/Forgiveness/St. Porphyrios, Bishop of Gaza/Holy Great Martyr Photini and Her Sisters*

Orthros: Fourth Tone

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): Luke 24:1-12

Epistle: Romans 13:11-14; 14:1-4

Gospel: Matthew 6:14-21

Fellowship: Daughters of Penelope

5:00 pm *Forgiveness Vespers*

Abstain from Meat and Dairy for 40 Days

Monday, February 27/*Clean Monday: First Day of Lent*

5:30 pm *Great Compline*

6:30 pm *Adult Study in Church: The Lenten Journey*



From Father John (Continued from Page 1)

Let us celebrate this milestone in the life of Florin and his family as well as in the life of our Parish and Holy Orthodox Church. Let us especially be grateful that our Lord Jesus Christ continues to ensure by His Grace that we have worthy candidates to minister to us, in preparation for the time we depart from this life as well as the Day of His Glorious Second Coming. AXIOS!

With Love and Gratitude in Christ,

Father John



During the Season of Fasting and Repentance, You are Invited to Join in an

Adult Study in the Church with Father John and Father Florin

*The Lenten Journey
A Six-Week Series*

Monday, February 27 ~ April 3

5:30 pm *Great Compline*

6:30 pm *Adult Study*

Holy Hieromartyr Haralambos, Intercede to Christ Our God for the Salvation of Our Souls!



Parish Council Report

Dear Father John, Florin, Ministries and Parishioners,

As we start preparing for the Ordination of Florin, before we know it, we will be referring to him as Father Florin. We are both excited and blessed to have him, Alexandra and Daria, as overseers and ministers of the Faith. The Holy Orthodox Church is gaining a wonderful clergy family, and a devoted priest and servant of God. Axios!

The Ordination of Florin to the Holy Diaconate will take place *on Saturday, February 4*. Philoptochos will host the Brunch following services. Florin's Ordination to the Holy Priesthood will be *on Sunday, February 5*. Please contact Karen *by February 1* to reserve and pay for your place(s) for the Luncheon following the services: \$25 per person, or \$250 for a reserved table of 10.

His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos, together with His Grace Bishop Ioannis, will be in attendance officiating the Ordinations. Please plan to attend. This Ordination Weekend will go down as another special day in the history of our Church's legacy.

I want to keep my column this month focused on the special days ahead. If you have any questions concerning this milestone event, please do not hesitate to contact a member of the Parish Council or our Ladies Philoptochos.

Along with me as President, our Parish Council Officers for 2023 are: Alex Mavros, Vice President; Alexia Conger, Secretary; Mark Karris, Treasurer; Kouli Pouridis, Assistant Treasurer.

May God continue to bless St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church.

John Fotopoulos, Parish Council President



Email Change: Please note that Florin Ristache's new email will be frflorin@vegasgreekorthodox.com following his Ordination.

Building and Maintenance Committee

I pray that all of you are having a great New Year. We had our first Parish Council meeting and have set some priorities for the coming year. One of these prime concerns is the replacement of our HVAC units. We put this out to bid and after talking with various companies and learning that the lead time is anywhere between 30-45 weeks, we decided to go ahead and order two 25-ton Carrier replacement units. These units will cost approximately \$95,000. We need and are seeking your generous donations to help us with this expense.

This month's repairs included the main backflow irrigation valve in front of Panos Hall, a roof repair in the warehouse with drywall replacement to soon be completed, as well as a defrost timer for the large walk-in freezer.

Regrettably, I am sad to inform everyone that Marc Harvel will be leaving us on the first of February. We are thankful for all his hard work over this past year. We are actively seeking a replacement but as you can imagine it is difficult to find a qualified candidate that can handle cleaning, electrical, plumbing and carpentry needs. Therefore, it is so imperative that everyone help where they can. It is more important than ever that everyone be respectful of our facilities and help in picking up after themselves and placing things back where they belong if used. If we all do not work together, our Church will reflect the lack of care quickly. Please feel free to reach out with any concerns or if you see anything requiring attention until we can fill his position.

In Christ, Eleni Filios, Chair of the Building and Maintenance Committee



Stewardship 2023

WALK IN LOVE

*“Walk in love, as Christ loved us
and gave Himself up for us,
a fragrant offering and
sacrifice to God.”
(Ephesians 5:2)*

**Connecting in Love
with Christ,
Our Church
and One Another
Throughout the Year!**

Please detach and return to St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

+++++

Please Print Name(s), Address, Phone and Email

“Walk in Love”

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

As a blessed member of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, I/we commit to \$ _____
per week/month, with the total amount for the year 2023 of \$ _____.

Signed: _____

Signed: _____

Orthodox Christian: Yes No

Orthodox Christian: Yes No

Others sharing in the gift (children): _____

Stewardship and Community Outreach

The Triodion begins this month, marking a period of our annual run-up to Pascha. Among other things, this entails increased spiritual reflection during the pre-Paschal season, increased gratitude for God's grace and mercy, and an increased focus on trying our best to live a Christian life. This month's Stewardship reflection offers the following words of Christ (as true as the Truth gets, folks!) for your review, reflection, and discernment.

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." (Matthew 24:35) Shortly following this 'absolute' statement, the *Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25*, includes the parables of the ten virgins and of the good stewards – in which Jesus broadly instructs that we must be prepared and be good stewards, for there will be a judgment of works. Today's homework: *Re-read Matthew 25*. Here is the gist: The Kingdom of Heaven is likened to ten virgins (the faithful) awaiting the bridegroom's (Christ's) return. Five were prepared and kept lamps filled with oil (mercy) and the other five did not. While the bridegroom was delayed, they all slept (died). A cry goes out at midnight (Second Coming) and the first five are ready to meet the Lord, while the other five, having to scramble for oil, miss out on entry into the wedding as the door was shut.



Next the Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a Man (Jesus) traveling to a far country who calls His servants (the faithful stewards) and deliver His goods (time, talents, treasures) to them. One received five talents and doubled its value; one received two talents and doubled its value; the last received one talent and returned just one, having done nothing but hide the talent in the ground. Upon the Master's return (Second Coming), the servants were held to account.

Finally, the judgment of works in this chapter is described as the Son of Man sitting on the throne of glory dividing "all the nations" (everyone) as a shepherd divides his sheep (the righteous, who listen to and follow His Voice) from the goats (the unrighteous). Note well how Jesus himself wraps up each of the three lessons in this chapter. On preparedness: *"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."* (Matthew 25:13) On being good stewards: *"And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* (Matthew 25:30) And on the Judgment of works by God: *"And these (the 'goats') will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."* (Matthew 25:46)

Consider how a couple of Church Fathers expounded these lessons centuries ago and note their continued relevance today: "I will tell you why charity seems to be signified by the oil. This is charity. It is 'that way above the rest,' which is with good reason signified by the oil. For oil swims above all liquids. Pour in water and pour in oil upon it; the oil will swim above. Pour in oil, pour in water upon it; the oil will swim above. If you keep the usual order, it will be uppermost; if you change the order, it will be uppermost. 'Charity never fails.'" (Augustine of Hippo, 5th Century)

"Christ is the man traveling into a far country, in reference either to His Ascent into the Heavens or to the length of time that He is long-suffering and does not summarily demand works from us, but waits. His servants are those who have been entrusted with the ministry of the Word, such as Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, and [those] who have received spiritual gifts, some greater, some lesser each one according to his own strength, that is, according to the measure of his faith . . . For into the vessel which I will offer to God, He places His gift to me. If it is a small vessel, a small gift; if it is a large vessel, a large gift. Whether a man be gifted with speech, wealth . . . or any other power or skill, if he desires to benefit not only himself but others as well, he doubles what has been given to him. But he who buries the talent is he who cares only for his own benefit and not for that of others, and he is condemned." (Theophylact of Ohrid, late 11th Century)

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CHURCH 360

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we expand the ways we communicate and engage with our community, we request you take the time to fill out the questionnaire we have prepared. Click [HERE](#) to access the questionnaire. The information you provide will only be used by the Parish to better serve the members of our community.

Everyone who fills out this questionnaire will be entered into a raffle. The winner of the raffle will receive: A beautiful Icon of the Baptism of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. The drawing for this raffle will take place *on Sunday, April 9 – Palm Sunday*.



Stewardship and Community Outreach (Continued from Page 6)

“See that God did not prepare the fire for men, nor did He make hell for us, but for the devil; but I make myself liable to hell. Tremble, then, O man, and understand from this that these men were not punished as fornicators, or robbers, or perpetrators of any other vice, but for not having done good. (Theophylact)

As we increase our attention to the Gospel teachings found in the many services heading toward and into Great Lent, let us reflect on the words of our Lord. May He help us to discern what they mean and how to apply them in our own lives.

And speaking of our own lives, let us give thanks for our newest good and faithful servant, (Mr. or Deacon, or Father, depending on when you read this) Florin Ristache, a man of many talents, who shares them freely with our community, along with his wife (Mrs. or Presvytera) Alexandra and baby Daria. May God bless your efforts, along with those of Father John and Presvytera Maria, here at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church.

Mike Beeler, Stewardship and Outreach Committee



Philoptochos News

Dear Father John, Florin and Fellow Members of St. John the Baptist:

The Ladies Philoptochos Society celebrated all our members on January 15, with the annual Membership Brunch following the Divine Liturgy. Thank you to Christina Snow and all the amazing Board Members who presided over the Brunch. We welcomed new members and returning members. At the Brunch, we shared how we, as members of our Parish, are multi-tasked and how we cross over into the ministries of the Church. As mothers, wives, sisters and daughters, we have fulfilled different callings. We teach Church School, sing in the Choir, our children are in the Folk Dance Group, we serve on Parish Council and Stewardship Committee. We are members of the Forerunners and keep our history alive in the Historical Committee. We are leaders in GOYA, Orthodox Family Fellowship, and participate in Mr. and Mrs. and Kali Parea. All these wonderful ministries are important to fulfilling our Faith and keeping the traditions and culture alive and ongoing in our Parish. We love to be a part of them.



However, as a member of the Ladies Philoptochos Society, you are not only a member in a ministry of St. John the Baptist, but your membership also makes you part of an International Greek Orthodox Philanthropic Organization that is celebrating its 90th Anniversary. While our focus is first on St. John Parish and Southern Nevada and assisting those in our community, the Ladies Philoptochos Society also participates in the Metropolis of San Francisco ministries and projects, such as Kids 'n' Cancer Camps and supporting our Metropolis students attending Hellenic College Holy Cross. When called upon, we also assist in National and International requests for help.

In our community, the Ladies Philoptochos Society offers many ways to participate in the mission statement that gives us our focus. We participate in the traditions of our Faith, practice philanthropy in Social Service projects, we have an Outreach program to visit or call our fellow Parish members, we fundraise in order to take care of our own and others, and most of all we build long-lasting friendships that bind us together. We share our hands in baking, cooking, decorating, packing, sewing, organizing, and most



importantly, we share our time. We welcome our new members to our community, as Las Vegas is a city of transplants. Whether you are here for a visit or a lifetime: Come and be part of us!

We invite all women to become a member of this amazing organization and we also welcome those

gentlemen (as associate members) who would like to help. Forms are available at the Stewardship table on Sundays, or by contacting the Church Office.

Lastly, and most importantly, the Ladies Philoptochos Society is so very happy and pleased to offer our prayers for Florin as he begins his new life in the Priesthood. We look forward to being witnesses to his Ordination. Axios!

If you have any questions about the Ladies Philoptochos Society, we have dedicated women that have served for many years who would be happy to speak with you. We are available every Sunday after Divine Liturgy. I look forward to welcoming you to the most soul-filling organization. Moreover, you can make it what you want it to be.

With Love in Our Lord and Savior, Bernadette Anthony, Philoptochos President

*From Florin***The Triodion and the Holy Ordination to the Priesthood**

Dearly Beloved in Christ,

This year the Triodion begins *on Sunday, February 5*, the day of my Ordination to the Holy Priesthood. The Triodion, also called the Lenten Triodion (Τριώδιον), is a liturgical book used by the Orthodox Church. This book contains the propers for the fasting period preceding Pascha (Easter) and for the weeks leading up to the fast, during which the Church prepares us for repentance. The canons for weekday Matins (Orthros) in the Triodion contain only three odes and so are known as “triodes,” after which the Triodion takes its name. The period which the book covers, extends from the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee (the tenth week before Pascha: 22 days before the beginning of Great Lent), and concludes with the Midnight Office of Holy Saturday.



The first Sunday of the three-week period prior to the commencement of Great Lent, on February 5, is called the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee, and that is the day when His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos, made the decision to ordain me, an unworthy servant, to the Holy Order of the Priesthood. Many of you already know my journey to the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. I was born in Bucharest, Romania, during the last years of the Communist times. The revolution brought changes with it, along with the freedom of religion, which many waited for so long and for which some gave their life. But it also brought the liberty of traveling, so the schools I attended intended to prepare its students for the changes that all were waiting for, so its purpose was to introduce in its curriculum modern foreign languages. Of course, at that age, I did not like it at all. I could not understand why I had to study the irregular verbs in English or the awfully difficult pronunciation of French. But all that struggle helped me a lot. I have always loved to travel, and so those years of struggle bore fruit in the end.

I studied Theology at the University of Bucharest, and for my Master's and PhD I went to Rome, Italy. The facilitation of speaking a Latin language helped a lot with the Italian language, and by God's grace, I was awarded with a scholarship. After the completion of my studies, by God's providence, I came to the US to visit at first, but it became a second home for me. I am here now, because God, Whose presence I have felt continuously throughout my whole life, guided my steps since I was born. Since I was a kid, I wanted to serve Him, but there were moments when I thought it was impossible. That is exactly when His presence became more prominent. And God works through people. And, if you allow me, I think this is the right moment to mention some of them.

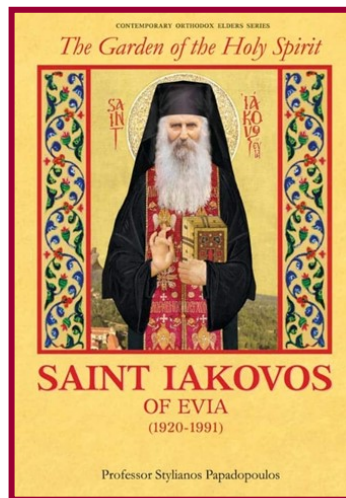
God definitely worked through my grandmother who took me to Church with her since I can barely remember. So, I thank her and my entire family who always supported me, especially my father, who was a priest and always dreamt to be near me this moment. Even though he cannot be here physically, he definitely is spiritually, watching me and serving with me at the Holy Altar. The person who made possible my presence here today in this beautiful Church, among these wonderful people, was of course my lovely wife, Alexandra. She agreed to follow me wherever God, through the bishop, would send me. She said yes! Also, His Grace, Bishop Ioannis said yes after he reviewed my CV sent to him by a professor of mine, Alex Tudorie, through Father Silviu Stanculescu, also a Romanian priest in the GOA. Then Bishop Ioannis presented me to His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos, who sent me here to meet with Father John and the whole community of St. John the Baptist. I am here today because everyone I have met said yes. Thank you all for saying yes to me!

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Orthodox Bookstore

Greetings from the Bookstore!

This month as we begin preparations for Great Lent, we are featuring *The Garden of the Holy Spirit: Saint Iakovos (Tsalikis) of Evia* by Professor Stylianos Papadopoulos. A simple man of God known for his diligence, humility, and suffering trials through a deep patience and love, we are well served by his example heading into the fast and ultimately Holy Week.



From the publisher:

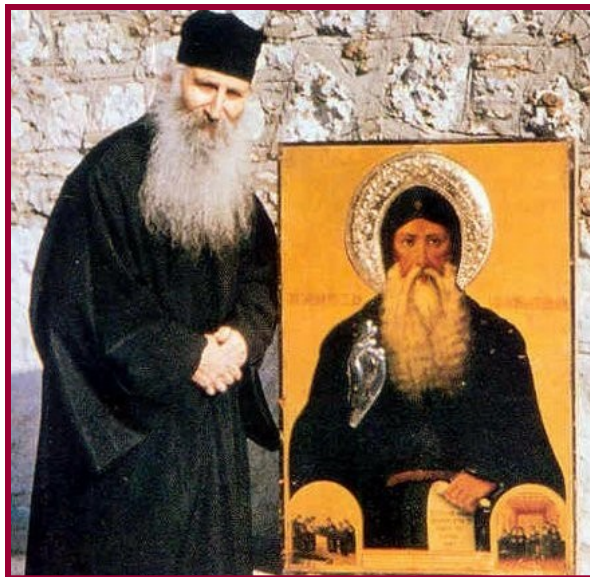
From his earliest years Iakovos Tsalikis wanted to become a monk, but he would have to wait. The world had to get to know him and he had to get to know the world. Born in Livísi, a picturesque village in Asia Minor, the Tsalikis family was forcibly uprooted from their ancestral homeland. Leaving the life they knew behind, they took with them what was their true life – their Faith. Resettled in Northern Evia, the future Saint was raised in piety and trained in virtue by his grandmother Despina and mother Theodora. Iakovos worked hard alongside his father, Stavros, and eventually became the provider for the family.

At the age of 32, he realized his calling in life by entering the Monastery of St. David the Elder in Evia, living the rest of his life there as a monk. He rose above insurmountable obstacles,

labored ascetically beyond what is human and suffered greatly for the sake of Christ. He received divine gifts as his reward, including clairvoyance and miracle-working, becoming an Elder of great stature.

The author of this book, Professor Papadopoulos, was blessed to know the Elder personally. His intimate knowledge of the Elder's life together with his literary talent make the story on these pages come alive. From the vivid, lively stories in this book, may we be moved to glorify God and ask St. Iakovos to intercede for us!

Serving you with Love in Christ,
Paraskevi Santamaria, Bookstore Director



From Florin (Continued from Page 9)

In the end, I am once again turning toward God, Who commanded us to pray without ceasing. I believe that the life of a priest should be an example of continuous prayer, even though it seems impossible. But again, nothing is impossible with God.

The Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee marks a new beginning for me and my family. This parable teaches us that we should not have confidence in one's self, which is a fundamental sin. When we center everything on ourselves, we actually cancel everyone around us, we create emptiness around us, and we also put ourselves on a pedestal so that everyone can see us. This is not what God wants from us. Jesus Christ our God is humble and taught us what true humility is by becoming one of us – He, the Creator of all! By God's mercy and by everyone's prayers, I hope that the gift of the Priesthood that I am receiving will teach me what it truly means to be humble and to serve God and His people. Amen!

With Gratitude in Christ, Florin Ioan Ristache

Ministry News

Church School

Hi Everyone! I hope your children are enjoying Church School this year. We are learning about living a sacramental life, and our curriculum is very interactive and based on age groups.

On Sunday, February 5, we will not have Church School due to the Ordination of Florin to the Holy Priesthood. I really encourage you and your children to be in attendance for the weekend activities. It is such an amazing opportunity to witness the Holy Sacrament of Ordination and very fitting for our theme this year of a sacramental life.

All the best to our FDF Dancers: Safe travels and I wish you a successful competition!

Please reach out to me with any questions or concerns.

In Christ, Eileen Koutsulis, Church School Director (702) 521-6516 or vivaleenie@cox.net

Greek Folk Dance

Our Annual Folk Dance Festival Preview event is set for *Sunday, February 12, following Liturgy in Panos Hall*. It will be a Pancake Breakfast! Please come and support our ministry as we showcase the three dance groups – Liondaria, Aetopoula, and Erimos – and all the dances they have learned this year! Our competitive groups will be accompanied by traditional instruments and musicians that traveled from Greece! Come enjoy this wonderful event.

This year, we have 46 dancers going to FDF, set in Phoenix for *February 16-20*. Wish us luck!

Much Gratitude, Folk Dance Board

Young Adults - 18 Years through Early 30s

Dear Young Adults of St. John the Baptist,

Please join us *on Sunday, February 12 at 2:00 pm*: We will have fun and resolve a mystery by going to the *Number 1 Escape Room* (1775 East Tropicana Avenue, Unit 100, Las Vegas). Every session lasts for approximately one hour, so plan to be there until 3:00 pm. After that, we can enjoy a meal and more fellowship at a location to be determined.

Please contact me to let me know you are coming. More details to come in the *Weekly*.

Thank you and hope to see you there, Florin



GOYA - Our Teen Ministry

Dear GOYANs,

Thank you all who came to help us take down the Parish Christmas Tree last month! We had so much fun!

This month, Lent starts! Please join us for our GOYA Night *on Sunday, February 26, from 5:00 until 7:00 pm*. We will begin our GOYA Night inside the Church for *Forgiveness Vespers at 5:00 pm*. Of course, everyone is invited to participate at Vespers.

Then at 6:00 pm, we GOYANs will enjoy a Lenten meal together as well as wonderful fellowship and activities. If you would like to contribute by bringing Lenten food to the event, please contact Maha, our GOYA Advisor.

Thank you all and see you soon! Love in Christ, Florin and Maha

“Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God.” (1 John 4:7)

Orthodox Family Fellowship (OFF)

We invite the families of the Parish to our annual *Lenten Mini-Retreat* for our OFF Ministry *on Saturday, March 4*. We will be attending the *Divine Liturgy for the Saturday of Souls starting at 9:00 am*, when we will pray for our departed ones. *From 11:00 am to 1:00 pm* we will go to Panos Hall and will enjoy Lenten food together, as well as other activities. Also, the children will have an opportunity for the Sacrament of Holy Confession with Father John.

If you would like to contribute by bringing Lenten food to our Mini-Retreat, please contact April, our OFF Advisor!

On behalf of the OFF ministry, we congratulate April and Eli on the recent 40 Day Blessing of their son, Andrew.

With Love in Christ, April and Florin

Youth Choir

Hurray! We have a wonderful response to our newly reorganized Youth Choir. We have been meeting *on Sundays after Church School Classes at 12:15 pm* for about 15-20 minutes in Classroom 6. We are working on a new English Divine Liturgy that will soon be published for use through the Metropolis of San Francisco.

Due to the Ordination of Florin and FDF events, we will resume practice *on Sunday, February 26*. I encourage our children ages 8 (Second Grade) and older to join our ranks. Participation in this group will ensure the continuation of worshipping in song in our Holy Orthodox Church.

Looking forward for new and returning members to join our ranks!

Love in Christ, Presvytera Maria

Mr. & Mrs.

Dear Couples of St. John the Baptist,

Please mark your calendars for *Friday, February 10, starting at 6:00 pm*, when we will meet at the *home of Mike and Effie Lekar*, whom we thank for generously opening their house to us. This is the first week of the Triodion, so it is fast-free! As their home is not child proof, this will be an adult-only event.

Please contact Karen for their address, and to let us know what you will bring. We are looking forward to seeing you all there for an amazing dinner and lively discussion.

Yours in Christ, Father John, Presvytera Maria, Florin and Alexandra

Forerunners - Our Seniors Fellowship

The Forerunners enjoyed a New Year Luncheon prepared by master chefs Steve Tzelalis, Mike Beeler, Marika Lamancusa, Demetri Asim and Demetri Theros.

The Vasilopita was blessed and cut by Father John. Tom Manakides and Terry Stavropoulos received the lucky coins. A raffle was held, and bingo was played. Everyone had a great time!

Join us for our Valentine's Day Luncheon *on Monday, February 13 at 11:30 am in Kokkos Hall*.

Love in Christ, Faye Brown



Fallen Asleep in the Lord

Anastasia Kozonas on December 22, 2022.

Funeral on January 11, 2023.

Smaragdi (Magda) Gianakoulis on December 25, 2022.

Funeral on January 10, 2023.



Liondaria

Aetopoula

Erimos

Please join for our Annual FDF Preview showcasing our folk dance groups and special musical guests from Greece

Sunday, February 12, 2023

Pancake Breakfast \$10

Panos Hall after Divine Liturgy

All proceeds to benefit our Folk Dance Ministry

**GREAT LENT BEGINS ON
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27**

HOLY WEEK IS APRIL 9 - 15

GREAT AND HOLY PASCHA IS APRIL 16

HOLY CONFESSION DURING LENT:

*Father John is available for Confession by appointment only
during the weekdays of Lent.*

Do not delay, as Confessions will not be heard Holy Week.

*"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive
our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)*

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

5300 S. El Camino Rd.
Las Vegas, NV 89118

Rev. Father John Hondros
frjohn@vegaskgreekorthodox.com

Florin Ristache, Pastoral Assistant
florin@vegaskgreekorthodox.com

Karen Rawlinson
Administrative Assistant

Michelle Eugenio
Bookkeeper

TBD
Maintenance & Grounds

Office Hours

Monday - Friday 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Telephone: (702) 221-8245
www.vegaskgreekorthodox.com

Parish Council: John Fotopoulos

Philoptochos: Bernadette Anthony

Stewardship & Community Outreach:
John Karas

Choir: Athena Mertes

Chanters & Youth Choir:
Presvytera Maria Hondros

Church School: Eileen Koutsulis

Altar Servers: Father John

GOYA:
Florin Ristache & Maha Habiba

Orthodox Family Fellowship:
Florin Ristache & April Rivera

Young Adults:
Florin Ristache

Greek Folk Dance: Sia Dalacas

Greek School: Paula Kelesis

Mr. & Mrs.:
Father John & Presvytera Maria

Kali Parea: Demetrious Asim

Adult Basketball:
Nick Kelesis

Forerunners: Paula Kelesis

Orthodox Bookstore:
Paraskevi Santamaria

Greek Food Festival: Gus Flangas

Hellenic Historical Society:
Nitsa Filios, Cheryl Pandelis &
Susan Stamis

Photography & Live-Streaming:
Bill & Erin Bruninga

**2023
Stewardship
Report
(as of 1/25/23)**

Stewardship Gifts Pledged: \$353,764 (\$255,413 in 2022)
 Stewardship Gifts Received: \$68,519 (\$66,662 in 2022)
 Unfulfilled Pledge Balance: \$285,245 (\$188,751 in 2022)
 Stewardship Families Pledged: 198 (190 in 2022)
 2023 Goal: \$600,000 . . . Keep the Pledges Coming!

***“WALK
IN
LOVE”
(Ephesians 5:2)***

<u>Average Pledge</u>	<u>No. of Families</u>	<u>Amount Pledged</u>
\$1 - \$500	70	\$ 17,289
\$501 - \$1,000	40	\$ 29,568
\$1,001 - \$2,500	55	\$ 87,439
\$2,501 - \$5,000	16	\$ 59,464
\$5,001 & Above	17	\$160,004
Total Families	198	\$353,764

Church Account Summaries - December 2022

Nevada State Bank Accounts	November	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	December	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
General Operating Account (GOA)	\$21,095.15	\$75,003.58	\$321.33	\$15,232.68	\$58,705.84	\$22,481.54	
Community and Education (C&E)	\$61,369.50					\$61,369.50	
Greek Food Festival (GFF)	\$92,136.05	\$4,913.00	\$1,208.00	\$10,144.33		\$88,112.72	
Designated, Restricted & Other (DR&O)	\$261,854.85	\$21,655.98		\$19,903.90	\$172.71	\$263,434.22	
Folk Dance Group	\$25,056.30	\$7,147.00		\$281.76	\$242.00	\$31,679.54	
Hellenic Historical Society	\$320.47			\$15.00		\$305.47	
Designated Funds	November	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	December	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Bookstore	\$35,911.70	\$3,777.00		\$2,281.80	\$172.71	\$37,234.19	
Ornaments	\$601.33					\$601.33	
Restricted Funds	November	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	December	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
ICON	\$5,567.58	\$150.00				\$5,717.58	
Library Account	\$1,470.77					\$1,470.77	
Giving Tree	\$7,889.87					\$7,889.87	
Faithtree	\$1,626.39					\$1,626.39	
Building Fund	\$105,522.05	\$17,728.98		\$17,622.10		\$105,628.93	Pew Upholstery
Youth Choir	\$2,989.18					\$2,989.18	
Church School	\$2,116.44					\$2,116.44	
Three Priests	\$52,055.52					\$52,055.52	
Roof Appeal	\$10,283.22					\$10,283.22	
Altar Servers	\$440.00					\$440.00	
GOYA	\$530.36					\$530.36	
Panos Flooring Repair	\$23,722.83					\$23,722.83	
Church Flooring Replacement	\$0.00					\$0.00	
Restricted Donation	\$5,654.00					\$5,654.00	
Live Streaming Equipment	\$473.61					\$473.61	
Designated, Restricted, and Other Total	\$261,854.85	\$21,655.98	\$0.00	\$19,903.90	\$172.71	\$263,434.22	
Other Funds	November	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	December	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Kokkos Scholarship Fund	\$62,481.46				\$789.81	\$61,691.65	as of 12.31.22
Commonwealth Investments (Icon)	\$119,437.39				\$4,410.82	\$115,026.57	Change in Investment

December 2022 Candles **\$6,148.51**

December 2022 Trays **\$5,415.00**

Total December 2022 Candles & Trays **\$11,563.51**



FEBRUARY 2023 ~ IN THE YEAR OF THE LORD

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

				1	2 Meeting of Our Lord in the Temple 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy	3		4 9:00 am Orthros 10:00 am Hierarchical Liturgy & Ordination to the Diaconate of Florin Ristache Ordination Brunch 5:00 pm Great Vespers
5 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Hierarchical Liturgy & Ordination to the Priesthood of Father Florin Ristache Ordination Luncheon (Pre-payment by Feb. 1)	6	7 6:00 pm Folk Dance Practice	8	9	10 St. Haralambos 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Artoclasia 6:00 pm Folk Dance Practice 6:00 pm Mr. and Mrs. at Lekar Home	11		18 First Saturday of Souls 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial
12 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy Folk Dance Preview Luncheon 2:00 pm Young Adults at Escape Room	13 11:30 am Forerunners Luncheon in Kokkos Hall	14 6:00 pm Folk Dance Practice	15	16	Folk Dance Festival in Phoenix, AZ 2/16-20			25 Second Saturday of Souls 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial
19 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	20	21 6:00 pm Parish Council Meeting in Library	22	23			24	
26 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy 12:15 pm Youth Choir 5:00 pm Forgiveness Vespers 5:00 pm GOYA Night (Meet in Church)	27 First Day of Lent/ Clean Monday 5:30 pm Great Compline 6:30 pm Adult Study in Church: The Lenten Journey	28						

The Desert Messenger

*St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
5300 South El Camino Road
Las Vegas, Nevada 89118-1922*

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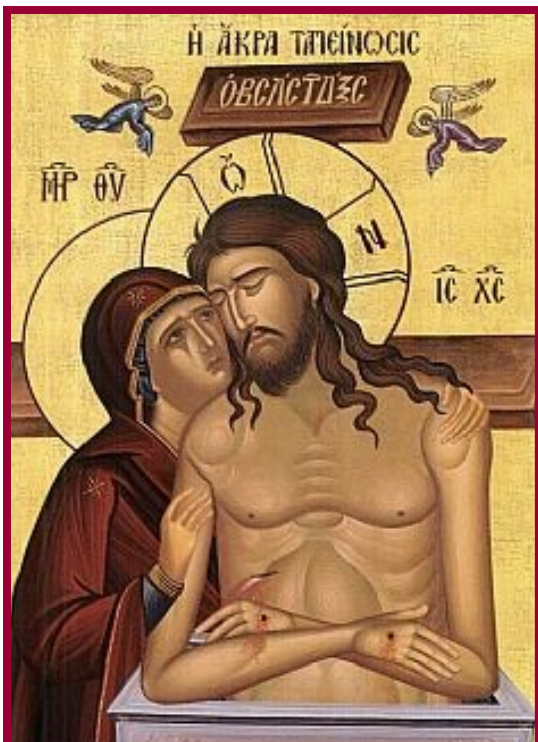
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THE DESERT MESSENGER

The Way of the Lord



Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian

*Lord and Master of my life,
cast away from me the spirit of laziness,
idle curiosity, love of power
and vain talk.*

*But grant me, Your servant,
the spirit of moderation, humility,
patience, and love.*

*Yes, Lord and King,
grant me to see my own faults and
not to judge my brothers and sisters.
For You are blessed forever. Amen.*