

# The Desert



# Messenger

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

Volume 19, Issue 1 St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Las Vegas, NV

January 2021

**From  
Father  
John**

Beloved in Christ:

Let us offer our heartfelt thanks and glory to God for granting us a New Year 2021! Who would have expected one year ago that we would face a universal pandemic and its effects on each one of us in every respect, whether physically, emotionally, financially, morally or spiritually? Yet, even in the face of this pandemic, we must continue to have faith and confess boldly – especially in this Season of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ's Nativity and Baptism – that *"God is with us."* (Isaiah 7:14)

As we prepare to celebrate *the Holy Theophany of our Lord on January 6*, we must understand that the Orthodox Church from its earliest years

has appointed this Great and Holy Feast as a means of spiritual renewal – and moreover, a renewal of our own Baptism – as echoed in the petitions and prayers of the Great Blessing of the Water that is integral to the Feast. The full celebration of the ancient Feast of Holy Theophany assumes the gathering of the faithful in the Church – just as we were physically present for our own Baptism – for both the Divine Liturgy and the Blessing of the Water (the latter service can also be celebrated near a body of water): As an extension of this service, it is customary during this season to have the priest offer the Blessing of Homes, which drives out demons, heals diseases of every kind and provides protective grace. With Holy Theophany, our loving and merciful Lord, Who humbled Himself to be baptized at the hands of St. John the Forerunner, offers each one of us, who are His children by grace, yet another invitation and opportunity to actively engage in spiritual renewal.

This much needed spiritual renewal provided through these holy services is something we may desire but, sadly, we may find it difficult to pursue, due to prolonged restrictions and the discomfort of many still after so many months of the pandemic. While many of us have slowly started coming back to Church, there are still many more who have stayed away: Moreover, due to the extended period of physical separation from the worship and Holy Sacraments, many have also become spiritually complacent and stayed away from live-streamed Church Services, a life of prayer, fasting, and the regular reading of Holy Scriptures, lives of the Saints and Orthodox spiritual books. Admittedly our physical participation in the spiritual life in the Church is challenged not only by the COVID 19 pandemic, but equally so by societal pressures and the oppressive 24/7 news reports and social media which consume us.

*(Continued on Page 3)*



## WORSHIP SCHEDULE

*Sundays: 8:45 am Orthros - 10:00 am Divine Liturgy*

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

Friday, January 1/*Circumcision of Christ/  
St. Basil the Great*

*9:00 am Orthros - 10:00 am Liturgy of St. Basil*

Epistle: Colossians 2:8-12

Gospel: Luke 2:20-21, 40-52

Saturday, January 2/*St. Seraphim of Sarov*

*8:00 am Orthros - 9:00 am Divine Liturgy*

Epistle: Hebrews 5:4-10

Gospel: John 3:1-15

Sunday, January 3/*Sunday Before Theophany/  
Prophet Malachi/Martyr Gordios of Ceasarea*

Orthros: Tone Five (First Plagal)

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): John 20:20:11-18

Epistle: 2 Timothy 4:5-8

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

Tuesday, January 5/*Eve of Theophany (Strict Fast)*

*6:00 pm Vespereal Liturgy of St. Basil the Great  
and Great Blessing of Water*

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27

Gospel: Luke 3:1-18

Wednesday, January 6/*Holy Theophany of Our  
Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ*

*8:00 am Orthros - 9:00 am Divine Liturgy of St.*

*John Chrysostom and Great Blessing of the Water*

Epistle: Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

Gospel: Matthew 3:13-17

Thursday, January 7/*Synaxis of St. John the  
Baptist: Our Parish Feast Day*

*8:00 am Orthros - 9:00 am Divine Liturgy and  
Artoclasia (Kakavulias Family)*

Epistle: Acts 19:1-8

Gospel: John 1:29-34

Sunday, January 10/*Sunday After Theophany/  
St. Gregory of Nyssa/St. Dometian of Melitene*

Orthros: Tone Six (Second Plagal)

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): John 20:19-31

Epistle: Ephesians 4:7-13

Gospel: Matthew 4:12-17

*Parish Council Oath and Community Vasilopita*

Sunday, January 17/*12th Sunday of Luke/  
St. Anthony the Great*

Orthros: Grave Tone

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): John 21:1-14

Epistle: Hebrews 13:17-21

Gospel: Luke 19:1-10

Memorial: Modesto Agbayani, Jr. (40 days)

Monday, January 18/*Ss. Athanasios and Cyril,  
Patriarchs of Alexandria*

*8:00 am Orthros - 9:00 am Divine Liturgy*

Epistle: Hebrews 13:7-16

Gospel: Matthew 5:14-19

Sunday, January 24/*14th Sunday of Luke/  
St. Babylus the Hieromartyr/St. Xenia the  
Deaconess of Rome*

Orthros: Tone Eight (Fourth Plagal)

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): John 21:14-25

Epistle: 1 Timothy 1:15-17

Gospel: Luke 18:35-43

Monday, January 25/*St. Gregory the Theologian,  
Archbishop of Constantinople*

*8:00 am Orthros - 9:00 am Divine Liturgy*

Epistle: Hebrews 7:26-28; 8:1-2

Gospel: John 10:9-16

Saturday, January 30/*The Three Holy Hierarchs:  
Ss. Basil, Gregory and John Chrysostom*

*8:00 am Orthros - 9:00 am Divine Liturgy*

Epistle: Hebrews 13:7-16

Gospel: Matthew 5:14-19

Sunday, January 31/*15th Sunday of Luke/  
Holy Unmercenary Healers Cyrus and John/  
St. Arsenios of Paros*

Orthros: Tone One

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

Epistle: 1 Timothy 4:9-15

Gospel: Luke 19:1-10

*"For the grace of God has appeared for  
the salvation of all people."  
(Titus 2:11)*

*From Father John (Continued from Page 1)*

St. Paul's words to the ancient Church in Rome are still relevant in our very different times: *"I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."* (Romans 12:1-2) Just as Jesus was incarnate – that is, He took on flesh for our salvation – our faith must be practiced in a holistic way, in body, mind and spirit. Jesus initiated our spiritual lives through His own Baptism, but we must freely and wholly allow His operative grace – which we received at the time of our Baptism – to be at work in us through an active physical, emotional and spiritual life in His Church and, equally so, by separating ourselves from those things that distract or detract us from living a transformed life that is pleasing to God.

Clearly, our spiritual renewal will require much effort and perhaps some baby steps at this time, especially with all we are facing. To begin, we must have faith that God heals us and grants us grace and spiritual growth in all His Holy Sacraments; we must become more mindful of God's Presence each day and disciplined in our prayer and fasting; we must cut out needless and harmful addictions to manipulative media, and instead partake of the necessary food for our souls through holy readings; we must repent regularly of our egotistical ways and strive to love, pray for, forgive and serve one another; and we must become more charitable, just as He is generous toward us in every respect. Indeed, spiritual regeneration is possible in these times – in the words of St. Paisios of Mt. Athos: *"Desire and effort must come from you. God will provide the power and result."*

With much love and prayers in Christ,

## REQUEST FOR HOUSE OR BUSINESS BLESSING

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_



*Please return the completed form to Father John or Karen.  
We will contact you to schedule!*

*For the blessing, please have a bowl of bottled water, a sprig of basil or rosemary, an icon or cross, and votive candle.*

*Please be mindful of health and safety protocols.  
Please do not prepare food; Father will join you for a raincheck meal when restrictions are lifted!*



## Parish Council Report

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! Needless to say, 2020 has been a very rough year that has truly tested our Faith and conviction. May God grant us the strength and courage to go forward into 2021 with optimism and hope, and to put aside any pessimism we may have, for pessimism is seriously constricting and limiting. Helen Keller once wrote: “No pessimist ever discovered the secrets of the stars or sailed to an uncharted land or opened a new heaven to the human spirit.” As Christians, we must choose to be optimistic about the future, and truly believe that our lives will get better and return to normal, believe that we can again greet each other warmly, believe that our children can return to their classrooms, believe that we can again work in our jobs and businesses without worry of being limited or shut down, believe that we can again visit our families and friends without fear of the unknown, and most of all, believe that we will again have the freedom to worship in our Faith without limitations.

We want to again thank everyone who have worked so hard and contributed so much of their time, talents, and treasures to keep our Church going during these most difficult of times. Even though we lost a significant portion of our revenue stream this year due to COVID, with the cancellation of the Greek Food Festival and the Agape Picnic, the downturn in collections from trays and candles especially during Holy Week, the cancellation of various fund-raising events, and the cancellation of events scheduled in Panos Hall, through the grace of God we made it. We made it through with the many generous contributions from our Parishioners through Stewardship, with the many large contributions we received from several of our Parishioners, with the help of PPP forgivable loans, and through the hard work of Skip Ruffner, a Grant from the State. In addition, we made it through because of the efforts of Nitsa Filios and Cheryl Pandelis, who worked so hard in getting our Mortgage paid off in full, and retired. Their efforts translated into a reduction of our annual expenses in an amount of around \$65,000. Their efforts could not have been timelier, given the restrictions foisted upon us by the Pandemic. As we continue forward on our journey, we urge each and every one of you who have the means, to continue contributing to help provide for and maintain the future of our Church.

As most of you know, we are in the midst of our annual Stewardship Drive. This past year, we had one of our best years in terms of Stewardship giving. We surpassed our 2020 Budget goal and actually reached the increased amount that we set forth in the 2021 Budget, without attributing several of the large gifts we received from several Parishioners. With that said, we hope to do better going into 2021. This past year with all the upheaval and turmoil, there is no question that Faith in God and our Church has been categorically paramount. As you know, Stewardship is the method that we as Parishioners have chosen to keep our Church operating. It also allows us to build toward our future, and its importance to our future cannot be over emphasized. We know that times are tough, but as you contemplate your Stewardship contributions, please remember the many Blessings you have received, pray and look into your heart, and thoughtfully look to “Giving Back,” with your time, talents and treasures.

We recently held our elections for the Parish Council. Congratulations to John Koutsulis on his reelection to the Council, and congratulations to Nick Barbarino, June Likourinou, Spero Demoleas and Constantinos Kanis on their first time election to the Council. In addition, we want to thank our outgoing members of the Parish Council – Skip Ruffner, Mark Karris, Jennia Szukiewicz and Demetrious Asim – for all their hard work and service to the Church. They will truly be missed, and we fervently hope that they will in the near future choose to serve again. The new Parish Council will take the Oath of Office during the Liturgy *on Sunday, January 10, 2021*. Following the Dismissal of the Liturgy, the new Parish Council will remain in the Church to elect this year’s Officers.

As many of you are aware, we had a tie between two outstanding Parishioners – Spiros Filios and Kouli Pouridis – for the final seat on the Council. Many have asked how this matter will be ultimately decided. Pursuant to the Uniform Parish Regulations and our Parish Bylaws, there will be vote by the new Parish Council to decide the matter at the first Parish Council Meeting *on Tuesday, January 19, 2021*. It is unfortunate that we cannot have both Parishioners join the Council, because both have given so much of themselves in the past to the Church and hopefully they will in the future continue to give, no matter the outcome.

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## Parish Council Report *(Continued from Page 4)*

For the 2021 Greek Food Festival, we were looking to hold it in May. However, given the current state of affairs, we believe that September will be a more appropriate and prudent time in which to have it, especially in terms of planning. With the various vaccines against COVID coming out, and forecasts of “herd immunity” by summer, we truly believe that September will definitely work, and we will therefore, start the comprehensive planning process in January.

Please note again that we will continue live-streaming all our Church Services, which we are doing through YouTube. To access the live-streamed services please go to <http://youtube.com/vegasgreekorthodox>. Again we would like to thank Bill and Erin Bruninga, Steve and Juliana Likourinou, and Skip Ruffner for making this happen.

We again urge everyone pray to for those afflicted with this dreaded disease which has so profoundly affected our world, for our medical personnel who are on the front lines fighting it, for our first responders, for those in the laboratories working on treatments and cures, for those who are working to provide much needed resources such as medical equipment and supplies, for our leaders to learn from mistakes and continue making the right decisions, for strength and toughness to endure these strange and challenging times, and most of all, for a speedy victory and end to the effects of this dreaded disease. Lastly, we ask everyone to pray for an end to the various maladies affecting our Nation and for everyone to come together as fellow human beings and Americans, and work toward a better life for everyone. It is only through working together that problems are solved.

For attending Church Services, we urge everyone to be safe and to comply with the guidelines and mandates for dealing with and defeating COVID-19, including wearing a mask, practicing social distancing and following other protocols set forth.

In closing, we urge everyone to take care of one another during these taxing times, and know that the more we allow God to direct and guide our lives, the more power and blessings we are going to have. God Bless!

Gus Flangas, Parish Council President

*Our Church is open for the  
scheduled Divine Services,  
on a first come/first served basis.  
Once our Church has reached capacity,  
per the State mandates,  
our Parish members will be directed to Panos Hall.  
There will be no Fellowship Hour or Kollyva  
until the restrictions are lifted.  
For the health and safety of all,  
please follow the posted guidelines.*

## ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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

Rev. Father John Hondros  
frjohn@vegasgreekorthodox.com

Rev. Father Seraphim Ramos  
frseraphim@vegasgreekorthodox.com

Karen Rawlinson  
Administrative Assistant

Michelle Eugenio  
Bookkeeper

Mara Braun  
Catering & Events

Constantin Petriuc & Ramona Tasios  
Maintenance & Grounds

*Office Hours*  
Monday - Friday 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Telephone: (702) 221-8245  
[www.vegasgreekorthodox.com](http://www.vegasgreekorthodox.com)

Parish Council: Gus Flangas

Philoptochos: Benita Beeman

Stewardship & Community Outreach:  
Justina Szukiewicz

Choir: Athena Mertes

Chanters & Youth Choir:  
Presvytera Maria Hondros

Church School: Eileen Koutsulis

Altar Servers: Father John

GOYA:  
Kouli Pouridis & June Likourinou

Orthodox Family Fellowship:  
Jelena Boskovic & Amy Khuri

Young Adults:  
Fr. Seraphim

Greek Folk Dance: Sia Dalacas

Greek School: Paula Kelesis

Mr. & Mrs.:  
Fr. John, Fr. Seraphim & Presvyteres

Kali Parea: Demetrious Asim

Adult Basketball:  
TBD

Forerunners: Victoria Xikis

Orthodox Bookstore:  
Paraskevi Santamaria

Greek Food Festival: Gus Flangas

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

Photography & Live-Streaming:  
Bill & Erin Bruninga

## Philoptochos News

My Dearest Sisters of Philoptochos and Parish Members,

Looking back on 2020, this was a year in which we have endured many trials and tribulations due to the Coronavirus Pandemic. Families have faced illnesses, the death of loved ones, financial hardships, and other difficulties. We have spent much of the year physically apart, or at least more distanced than ever before, both from those we love and the normal pattern of our daily lives. The New Year is a time where we must recommit ourselves to God's work and to the ministry of our Philoptochos as we aspire to help those in need. True happiness is obtained through acts of kindness filled with love that we share with our family, our friends, and our neighbors. May this New Year be filled with many blessings to all people.

**St. John the Baptist Community Christmas Card:** We had 128 families participate in the Community Christmas Card this year. Our sincere appreciation to Bill Bruninga, Bessie Stavropoulos, and Karen Rawlinson for their continued assistance with our Christmas Card production: 2020's design and final product was absolutely gorgeous.

**Philoptochos Christmas Raffle:** Our Panagia Chapter had a virtual raffle on Sunday, December 20 with three fabulous prizes. 1<sup>st</sup> Prize – A beautiful 14 carat gold diamond Cross that was won by Agapi Eliades. 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize – A Las Vegas Raiders basket with memorabilia and two game tickets for 2021 was won by Geri Kypreos. And 3<sup>rd</sup> Prize – A lovely Icon of the Nativity of Christ made by the Sisters of the Life-Giving Spring Monastery in Dunlap, CA, was won by Sharon Katsaros. Thank you to all who purchased tickets! Proceeds will benefit our many Philoptochos charities.

**On Sunday, January 10,** we will have the **Blessing and Cutting of the Community Vasilopita**. In celebration of St. Basil the Great, our Philoptochos Chapter provides large Vasilopites for the whole Church community made by Dora Hart and Yiota Lieblen, with a coin in each loaf. Father John will bless and cut the sweet bread in Church and distribute pieces to the congregation: Each recipient is requested to make a monetary donation in support of St. Basil Academy in Garrison, NY – a ministry of our Archdiocese that provides a home for families with troubled children.

There will be a **Zoom Philoptochos General Meeting on Tuesday, February 9 at 6:00 pm.**

I would like to express my sincere thanks to our wonderful Board, our chairwomen, and all our members for their efforts, time, donations, and participation to make our Philoptochos programs and projects a success, even though times were difficult. I look forward to a New Year with each and every one of the wonderful Philoptochos ladies, and know that together we can accomplish a lot more in 2021!

I hope everyone has a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year. May 2021 be our best year yet!  
With Love in Christ, Benita Beeman, Philoptochos President



The Ladies Philoptochos Society Panagia Chapter  
Invite All Parish Members to Join Us for

The Annual Blessing and Cutting of  
The Community Vasilopita  
On Sunday, January 10, 2021

*Everyone present will receive a piece of the  
Sweet St. Basil's New Year Bread at the dismissal of the  
Divine Liturgy. Please offer your donation to benefit  
St. Basil Academy for Children.*



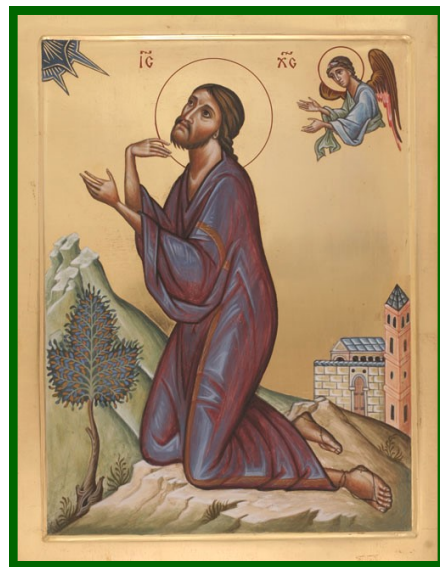


## From Father Seraphim

*“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?  
Can faith save him? . . . But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.”  
Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.  
. . . For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”  
(James 2:14, 18, 26)*

January has brought us a New Year, and perhaps this year more than many others people will be keen to set a New Year's Resolution – leaving behind what many may remember as “the worst year ever.” Resolutions commonly include goals concerning the health of the body, or more honestly, its aesthetic appearance. There is certainly nothing wrong with investing time and energy into being healthy, but unfortunately in our Christian lives bodily *asceticism* – struggle and discipline leading to spiritual health of the soul – is often sorely neglected if not utterly forgotten.

The heresy of “faith alone” has slipped into too many of us Orthodox Christians. Many have tried to live solely by their minds and spirits without any physical relationship and embodiment of their faith – through holy exercises like doing full body prostrations, waking up at night to pray or keep vigil, or taking the fasting practices of the Church seriously. The Holy Gospels reveal that our Lord Jesus Christ practiced asceticism through fasting, kneeling, and keeping night vigils! Yet, if someone should start to express faith in concrete actions – through obedience to our Lord and the Tradition of the Church itself – they are often accused of “trying to save themselves through works only,” or worse, are called one of the commonly deployed and deplorably inaccurate words, *fanatic*, *zealot*, or *radical*. The result of this binary division between faith and works (addressed above in the verses from St. James' epistle) is that we have once again begun to employ to the ancient false teaching of Gnosticism, acting as if our spirits or souls are the “real us” and our bodies are just a shell that needs eventual escaping. This mistaken paradigm has even affected certain views on gender and identity – leading some to believe that their soul's true gender does not match up with the physical one – and there is a temptation to live by a disembodied faith.



Why does the *bodily* Resurrection of Christ mean so much to us? Christ showed us that all human beings (made up of the conjoined body and soul) are destined for the Resurrection: Body and soul belong together even in eternity! Many of the great Fathers of the Church taught us that the spiritual struggle is *with* the body and *for* the body. Now, just as we have all learned by February of most years, resolutions are difficult to keep; likewise it is difficult in these times of comfort and technology to not become like the ancient Gnostics. It is not easy to live *ascetically*, with intentionally repeated spiritual exercises involving our souls and bodies. Preserving bodily wholeness is also difficult in today's confusing culture in which sleeping together is expected in courtship or even dating!

What then can we do when pilgrimages, involving bodily toil and a sacrifice of money to end up at a beautiful spiritual oasis, are expensive and require using scarce and valuable vacation days? Fasting is inconvenient and we do not know the right recipes or where to eat: Giving up our favorite foods to gain a deeper love for Christ and self-control is not even talked about outside of Church circles. Standing in our homes to pray, doing prostrations, spiritual reading, hospitality and generosity – all of it is disagreeable and uncomfortable to the fallen part of us that demands self-worship, pleasure, ease and comfort. We must all consider, however, what role our body plays in our spiritual life. What happens when we do not struggle and do these ascetic practices? Do we want a spiritual path and a salvation that does not involve our bodies? Because if so, then our spirituality may be classically or philosophically “Greek” – that is, pagan – but it is no longer Christian or Orthodox.

*(Continued on Page 8)*

## Stewardship and Community Outreach



Wow, another calendar year come and gone, which means a dozen more Stewardship articles in the can (figuratively and/or literally) and a like number to be published this year. I sense a keen anticipation to read further on Stewardship – but this month's reflection will not ask you to focus on the importance of receiving your freely-given gifts of time, talents, and treasure in maintaining a strong Church community. It will not ask you to focus on the vital importance Stewardship plays in enabling the many ministries whose primary goal is to accomplish the mission of Church. It will not even ask you to focus on the many lessons found throughout Scripture of the countless blessings, both tangible and intangible, which accrue

though generosity. No, this will not be another reflection pleading for attention and support – we have written, and you have read, innumerable articles like that in the past.

This month's reflection will focus rather on sharing our *thanks*:

- To those who have fulfilled their 2020 Stewardship Commitment and submitted a 2021 Stewardship Commitment Card, we thank you for your continued support during these challenging times.

- To those who intend to fulfill their 2020 Stewardship Commitment and submit a 2021 Stewardship Commitment Card, we appreciate your contributions to date and look forward to hearing from you soon.

- To those who have read this far and are thinking, “Gee, I would like to help too.” We thank you for your prayerful consideration and will gladly welcome you among the Stewards of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church.

Finally, lest you think this month's reflection a bit meager, I will leave you to ponder this 5<sup>th</sup> Century nugget from St. Leo the Great:

*“What is offered from a little is great, and in the scale of divine justice, the quantity of gifts is not measured, but the steadfastness of souls. The widow in the Gospel put two coins into the treasury, and this surpassed the gifts of all the rich. No mercy is worthless before God. No compassion is fruitless. He has given different resources to human beings but He does not ask different affections.”*

Mike Beeler for the Stewardship and Outreach Committee

## From Father Seraphim (Continued from Page 7)

In his recently published masterpiece, *The Ethics of Beauty*, Dr. Timothy Patitsas poses a great question to each and every one of us: “If I allow my body no role whatsoever in my service to God, let alone the central role it deserves and demands, then what is the point in confessing faith in God Incarnate, of celebrating Christmas, or that Christ is risen bodily from the dead, of hoping for my own bodily resurrection, of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, or even being baptized? . . . If, like me, you don't fast much, nor make prostrations, nor pray in such a way that brings bodily fatigue, nor receive sufferings as spiritual ‘medicine’ from God, then let us begin anew together!”

As we look out upon a brand New Year, like a fresh snowfall – totally pure and unspoiled – let us help and encourage one another to try once more: May we invoke and call upon the abundant and freely given grace of our God, Who lived in and took upon Himself our flesh, in 2021 to set and keep attainable resolutions that will have eternal consequences.

With Love in Christ,

*Father Seraphim*





## CONNECTION!

*“ . . . that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You;  
that they also may be one in Us . . . ” (John 17:21)*

## CONNECTING WITH . . . CHRIST OUR CHURCH AND ONE ANOTHER

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

+++++

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 2021 CONNECTION

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 2021 of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Orthodox Christian: Yes No

Orthodox Christian: Yes No

Others sharing in the gift (children): \_\_\_\_\_

## Ministry News

### Church School

Christ is Born, Glorify Him! Happy New Year and Many Blessings for 2021!

Apart from our Teen Class, we are still unsure of when we will meet again in person for Church School. However, our Church is open for in-person services: Please bring your children, as we would love to see them!



A special thank you to Karen, as she emails the *Children's Bulletin* every week along with the *Orthodox Journeys* Church School Curriculum provided to you by our Parish. They are both excellent resources while we are continuing to learn and grow at home. The *Orthodox Journeys* lesson plans are filled with a ton of great information following the Church calendar week by week. I encourage you to print both resources, and together with your children continue to practice, grow in, and learn more about our transformative Orthodox Faith.

These are troubling times, but with goodwill and discipline we can use technology in a holy way – I cannot imagine where we would be if this pandemic happened 10 or 20 years ago: Today we have YouTube to follow our live-streamed Church Services and watch the lives of Saints, blogs to follow with inspiring miracles and beautiful icons, online ordering for Orthodox books, cd's, prayer ropes, and podcasts – we even have many Orthodox Facebook pages! Please feel free to reach out to me if you need any sort of suggestion to keep the fire of our Holy Orthodox Faith burning brightly in your heart.

In Christ, Eileen Koutsulis, Church School Director

### Orthodox Family Fellowship & GOYA: Combined January Events

*Rock Climbing on Sunday, January 10 at 3:00 pm*

*Zoom Meeting and Spiritual Discussion on Sunday, January 24 at 3:00 pm*

Happy New Year!

For the past ten months we have been doing virtual gatherings via Zoom video technology. In the New Year we will begin to see the level of interest in activities at venues that follow the protocol for safety and health. One such venue is the largest Rock/Boulder climbing gym in Nevada: Origin Climbing and Fitness (7585 Commercial Way J, Henderson). More information is available at their website <https://thepadorigin.org/origin-henderson-nv/>, which includes an entire page of Coronavirus Policies.

This is a truly massive facility, at 22,000+ square feet, and has every level of difficulty available so young and old, skilled and beginner can all enjoy equally the most basic of human activities . . . climbing! Each parent will be required to sign waivers upon arrival (see the website for waivers), and each climber will be outfitted with a belt/harness, special climbing shoes, and a bag of chalk to protect the hands from chafing. It is a genuinely enjoyable experience and a good physical workout as well. **Adult Day Pass: \$20, Youth (4-17) Day Pass: \$12. Harness/Belay Device: \$7 and Chalk Bag: \$2.** Stay as long as you like! Includes free rental shoes; kids under 3 free with guardian day pass. The facility even has a large meeting room so we could have an Orthodox lesson/discussion together once everyone is done climbing. Please bring your own snacks and lots of water as the only food available for sale is from a vending machine.

*Our OFF/GOYA Rock Climbing will be on Sunday, January 10 at 3:00 pm.* RSVP with Father Seraphim at [frseraphim@vegaskgreekorthodox.com](mailto:frseraphim@vegaskgreekorthodox.com) or (702) 768-7480, so we can apply for a group rate.

Later in the month, *on Sunday, January 24, we will have a combined Zoom Meeting and Discussion at 3:00 pm* – and we will learn more about the Three Holy Hierarchs, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom (whom we commemorate on January 30). Looking forward to seeing you at both events!

Love in Christ, Father Seraphim

## Ministry News

### *Young Adults: Rock Climbing on Sunday, January 17 at 3:00 pm*

For the past ten months we have been doing virtual gatherings via Zoom video technology. In the New Year we will begin to see the level of interest in activities at venues that follow the protocol for safety and health. One such venue is the largest Rock/Boulder climbing gym in Nevada: Origin Climbing and Fitness (7585 Commercial Way J, Henderson). More information is available at their website <https://thepadorigin.org/origin-henderson-nv/>, which includes an entire page of Coronavirus Policies.



This is a truly massive facility, at 22,000+ square feet, and has every level of difficulty available so young and old, skilled and beginner can all enjoy equally the most basic of human activities . . . climbing! Each participant will be required to sign waivers upon arrival (see the website for waivers), and each climber will be outfitted with a belt/harness, special climbing shoes, and a bag of chalk to protect the hands from chafing. It is a genuinely enjoyable experience and a good physical workout as well. Day Pass: \$20. Harness/Belay Device: \$7 and Chalk Bag: \$2. Stay as long as you like! Includes free rental shoes.

The facility has bouldering: 10,000 square feet, averaging 17 feet high; rope climbing: 93000 square feet, averaging 35 feet high; five auto-belays; free weight stations, treadmills; free Wi-Fi and coffee – bring your own cup; dedicated climbing training with hang boards, systems board, tread wall, LED kilter board, and more. The facility even has a large meeting room so we could have an Orthodox lesson/discussion together once everyone is done climbing. Please bring your own snacks and lots of water as the only food available for sale is from a vending machine.

*Our YA Rock Climbing will be on Sunday, January 17 at 3:00 pm.* RSVP with Father Seraphim at [frseraphim@vegasgreekorthodox.com](mailto:frseraphim@vegasgreekorthodox.com) or (702) 768-7480, so we can apply for a group rate. See you there!

Blessed New Year! Father Seraphim

### *If you have never been climbing before, here is what you need to know:*

- ✦ You do not have to have experience or be in amazing shape.
- ✦ Wear comfortable clothing. We have free shoes for you to use – toddler to size 15!
- ✦ Tell the people at the front desk that you are new and would like help – if they are too busy to do it, they will find someone who can.
- ✦ When you are on your own, do not be afraid to ask someone for tips on the climb you are trying. We all started in the same place once, and it is immensely satisfying to see people improve with tips you are given.

It is easy to get started if you try bouldering first: There is no “safety equipment.” The floor is covered with a foot of foam and vinyl. If you fall, it is a cushioned fall. Generally our fear of falling is what keeps us from getting into too much trouble. You do not have to get to the top. You just have to have fun and do your best.



## Orthodox Bookstore

Greetings from the Bookstore. God is Revealed!

In the spirit of the upcoming Feast of Theophany, the full revelation of the Holy Trinity at our Lord's Baptism, the Bookstore is featuring the latest edition of *His Life is Mine*, by newly canonized Saint Sophrony (November 27, 2019) of Mt. Athos and Essex, England.

Born in Tsarist Russia in 1896 and the spiritual child of Staretz Silouan (St. Silouan of Mt. Athos), St. Sophrony considered meeting his spiritual father to be one of the greatest gifts God had ever bestowed upon him. This book reflects his ardent desire, according to translator Rosemary Edmonds, "to record the precepts which had so helped him to find his bearings in the wide expanses of the spirit by instructing him in ways of spiritual combat." This discipleship moved St. Sophrony toward the endeavor of knowledge of God beyond mere intellection – a reality akin to theophany and true illumination in the Orthodox Church.

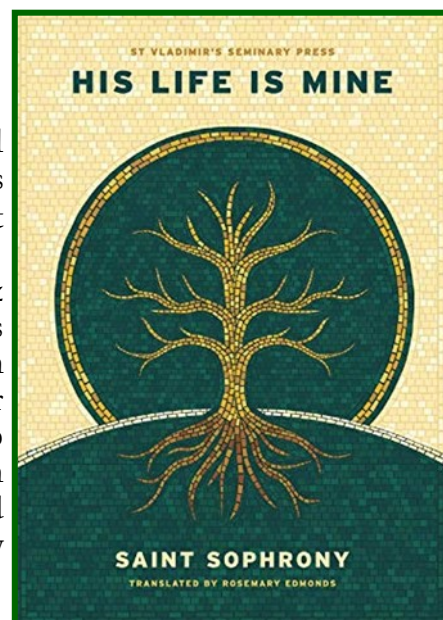
From *His Life is Mine*:

"What is the essence of Christian contemplation? . . . As I was taught, true contemplation begins the moment we become aware of sin in us . . . To apprehend sin in oneself is a spiritual act, impossible without grace, without the drawing near to us of Divine Light. . . The first manifestations of this Uncreated Light do not allow us to experience it as light. It shines in a secret way, illuminating the black darkness of our inner world to disclose the spectacle that is far from joyous for us in our normal state of fallen being. We feel a burning sensation. This is the beginning of real contemplation – which has nothing in common with intellectual or philosophical contemplation."

If you are wishing to explore the depths of the spiritual disciplines of the Orthodox Church that lead us beyond the non-stop ruminations of philosophy or secular reasoning, then this book is for you! Our store also offers another selection by St. Sophrony on the writings of St. Silouan called *Wisdom from Mount Athos*, and we will soon have the icon set of both Saints on hand.

Come and see how God is revealed!

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



## Greek School

Happy New Year! Χρονία Πολλά!

I miss you and hope you and your families are well. Although we are not having in-person Greek School, the publisher of our textbooks, Papaloizos Publications, has many resources and education materials available for both children and adults in book form or digitally. Please check out [www.greek123.com](http://www.greek123.com). If you need any help, please contact me at (702) 249-4740 and I will gladly help you. Please keep looking in *The Desert Messenger* for updates on Greek School here at St. John the Baptist Church. Paula Kelesis, Director

## AHEPA Las Vegas Chapter 314



The AHEPA 314 Chapter of Las Vegas would like to wish everyone a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

We will meet via Zoom *on Tuesday, January 12 at 7:30 pm*. Please email us at [ahepa314@gmail.com](mailto:ahepa314@gmail.com) if you are interested in becoming involved with AHEPA.

Steve Liaos, Acting President (702) 518-8018



## Our Community Registry

### *Baptized into Christ: Na Mas Zisoun!*

Nikoletta (Kyla),  
daughter of Dionysios and Brianna Kouretas,  
on December 5, 2020.

Godparent: Demetrious Kouretas.

### *Marriages: Na Zisete!*

Dionysios Kouretas and Brianna Eck on December 5, 2020.  
Koumbaros: Demetrious Kouretas.

Neil Doran and Eugenia Markantonis on December 12, 2020.  
Koumbara: Presvytera Maria Hondros.

### *Fallen Asleep in the Lord*

Vasilios Karagiorgis on October 28, 2020. Funeral on December 15.

**YAL CONFERENCE**  
METROPOLIS OF SAN FRANCISCO

THE GREEK ORTHODOX  
METROPOLIS OF SAN FRANCISCO  
PRESENTS

# VIRTUAL YAL CONF

Saturday January 9th & Sunday January 10th

## RECLAIM!

NO COST TO ATTEND  
REGISTER NOW AT  
<https://cvent.me/ZQ2bzt>

The Young Adult League (YAL) Conference is back – virtually – and it promises to be a weekend to RECLAIM your faith and begin the New Year with a fresh outlook on new opportunities for faith, fellowship, worship, and service. Make sure your calendar is marked for Saturday, January 9 and Sunday, January 10, 2021 and plan to join this thriving movement. Hosted by the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco, this YAL virtual weekend will include engaging presentations, interactive breakout groups, diakonia (community service), and entertainment. Under the leadership of YAL Conference Chairman George Anagnostopoulos, the Steering Committee has been working hard to plan a diverse program that will bring together hundreds of young adults from throughout the Metropolis of San Francisco and across the Archdiocese.

## LIGHTING A CANDLE FOR YOU:

Your Priests are here to light a candle for you and your loved ones on a request basis. Please call Karen at the Church Office with your request. Any offering you can make during these challenging times, though not required, will be most appreciated.



### 2020 Stewardship Report (as of 12/30/20)

Stewardship Gifts Pledged: \$506,155 (\$493,611 in 2019)  
 Stewardship Gifts Received: \$488,597 (\$475,393 in 2019)  
 Unfulfilled Pledge Balance: \$17,558 (\$18,218 in 2019)  
 Stewardship Families Pledged: 414 (431 in 2019)  
 Average Pledge to Date: \$1,223 (\$1,145 in 2019)  
 Average Pledge Needed: \$2,404 (414 Families)

## Church Account Summaries - November 2020

Nevada State Bank Accounts	October	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	November	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
General Operating Account (GOA)	\$1,775.19	\$87,618.81	\$3,505.69	\$3,713.29	\$36,445.72	\$52,740.68	
Community and Education (C&E)	\$2,673.17	\$1,000.00	\$268.77		\$2,268.77	\$1,673.17	\$2000 transferred to GOA to cover Bills & Payroll
Greek Food Festival (GFF)	\$161.47	\$120.00			\$15.00	\$266.47	
Designated, Restricted & Other (DR&O)	\$223,577.54	\$1,731.00		\$120.68	\$1,320.65	\$223,867.21	
Folk Dance Group	\$17,966.00					\$17,966.00	
Hellenic Historical Society	\$3,292.94					\$3,292.94	
Designated Funds	October	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	November	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Bookstore	\$4,885.67	\$1,731.00		\$120.68		\$6,495.99	
Ornaments	\$1,169.41					\$1,169.41	
Restricted Funds	October	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	November	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
ICON	\$140,366.44					\$140,366.44	
Library Account	\$1,470.77					\$1,470.77	
Giving Tree	\$1,936.97					\$1,936.97	
Faithtree	\$1,626.39					\$1,626.39	
Building Fund	\$25,169.26					\$25,169.26	
Youth Choir	\$2,989.18					\$2,989.18	
Church School	\$1,306.37					\$1,306.37	
Three Priests	\$39,033.50					\$39,033.50	
Roof Appeal	\$3,041.22					\$3,041.22	
Altar Servers	\$440.00					\$440.00	
GOYA	\$142.36					\$142.36	
<b>Designated, Restricted, and Other Total</b>	<b>\$223,577.54</b>	<b>\$1,731.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$120.68</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$225,187.86</b>	
Other Funds	October	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	November	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Kokkos Scholarship Fund	\$70,650.45					\$70,650.45	

November 2020 Candles **\$4,646.00**  
 November 2020 Trays **\$3,760.00**  
**Total November Candles & Trays \$8,406.00**





# JANUARY 2021 ~ IN THE YEAR OF THE LORD

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

						
<b>3</b> 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	<b>4</b>	<b>5 Eve of Theophany</b> 6:00 pm Vespers Liturgy of St. Basil the Great & Great Blessing of the Water	<b>6 Holy Theophany</b> 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy & Great Blessing of the Water 5:00 pm Teen Class: Faithtree Relationship	<b>7 St. John the Baptist</b> 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b> Virtual YAL Conference (thru 1/10)
<b>10</b> 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy Parish Council Oath Community Vasilopita 3:00 pm OFF & GOYA Rock Climbing	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b> 7:30 pm AHEPA Zoom Meeting	<b>13</b> 5:00 pm Teen Class	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>17 St. Anthony</b> 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy 3:00 pm Young Adults Rock Climbing	<b>18 St. Athanasios and Cyril</b> 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy	<b>19</b> 6:00 pm Parish Council Meeting in Kokkos Hall	<b>20</b> 5:00 pm Teen Class	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>24</b> 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy 3:00 pm OFF & GOYA Zoom Meeting	<b>25 St. Gregory</b> 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b> 5:00 pm Teen Class	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30 Three Holy Hierarchs</b> 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy
<b>31</b> 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy						
<b>1 Circumcision of Christ/St. Basil</b> 9:00 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy of St. Basil <b>Church Office Closed</b>		<b>2 St. Seraphim of Sarov</b> 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy				

# *The Desert Messenger*

*St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church  
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THE DESERT MESSENGER

## *The Way of the Lord*

*At Your Baptism in the Jordan River, O Lord,  
the worship due to the Holy Trinity  
was made manifest,  
for the Voice of the Father bore You witness  
by calling You "Beloved Son,"  
and the Holy Spirit, in the form of a Dove,  
confirmed the immutability of this declaration.*

*O Christ God Who appeared and  
illumined the world: Glory to You!  
(Apolytikion of Theophany)*

*Blessed New Year 2021!*

