

The Desert



Messenger

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

Volume 19, Issue 2 St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Las Vegas, NV

February 2021

**From
Father
John**

Beloved in Christ:

On *February 2*, the Orthodox Christian Church commemorates the *Great Feast of the Meeting of Our Lord in the Temple*. Forty days earlier, on December 25, we celebrated the Nativity in the Flesh of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. Eight days later, on January 1, we remembered His Circumcision in the flesh and naming (*Luke 2:21*) – in adherence to the ancient Covenant which God established with the righteous Patriarch Abraham. Twelve days after the Nativity, on January 6, we celebrated the Baptism of Christ at the hands of John the Forerunner on the Feast of Holy Theophany, commemorating the beginning of our Lord’s public ministry at the age of 30 and, more significantly, the event which paved the way for our “re-birth” through Holy Baptism into the mystical Body of Christ – His Church.

Finally, on the fortieth day, in accordance with the Mosaic Law – as recorded in *Luke 2:22-40* – Jesus’ earthly parents *“brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord . . . and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord.”*

This ancient feast completes the glorious Theophany Season: Moreover, the Holy Tradition of blessing the mother and infant at birth, along with the prayers of naming the newborn child, followed by the forty-day blessing of the mother and baby in the Church – all in preparation for Baptism – continues still today in Orthodox Christianity, allowing us significant ways to pattern our lives and those of our children after the life of Christ.

We believe and confess that Jesus Christ is coeternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit – yet admittedly, the extent of our Lord’s *Kenosis* (Self-emptying) for our salvation is mind-boggling: *“(He) emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:7-8)* Our Lord Jesus is our Creator, and yet He humbles Himself to become Man while remaining fully Divine . . . He Who is the Giver of the Covenant fulfills it by allowing Himself to be circumcised in the flesh . . . He fulfills the Old Covenant and grants us the way to eternal Life in His Kingdom through His Baptism in the Jordan River . . . and He Who gave the Prophet Moses the Tablets of the Law is humbly obedient to it through the forty-day blessing! Self-emptying, condescension, deep humility – ultimately unto His Death on the Cross – and continuous obedience to His Heavenly Father and Earthly Parents: All these are the steadfast traits of our loving, merciful and saving God!



(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>***

Tuesday, 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

***Sunday, February 7/16th Sunday of Matthew/
St. Parthenios Bishop of Lampsakos/St. Luke the Righteous***

Orthros: Tone Two

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

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

***Memorials: Philoptochos Departed Members;
Louis Elias Hallis (40 days); Fotini Karas Beadell (6
months), Alexandra Karas Gonos; and Stephen
Borzeka (1 year).***

Wednesday, February 10/Hieromartyr Haralambos

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy

Artoclasia offered by Lekar and Eliades Families

Epistle: 2 Timothy 2:1-10

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

Sunday, February 14/Sunday of the Canaanite Woman/St. Afxentios of the Mountain

Orthros: Tone Three

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

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; 7:1

Gospel: Matthew 15:21-28

Sunday, February 21/Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee/Triodion Begins/St. Timothy of Symbola/St. Eustathios, Patriarch of Antioch

Orthros: Tone Four

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

Epistle: 2 Timothy 3:10-15

Gospel: Luke 18:10-14

Artoclasia offered by Effie and Sam Koutsulis

Triodion Begins: No Fasting This Week

***Sunday, February 28/Sunday of the Prodigal Son/
St. Basil the Confessor/New-Martyr Kyranna***

Orthros: Tone Five (First Plagal)

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): Luke 24:13-35

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Gospel: Luke 15:11-32

Fast on Wednesday and Friday



**New Adult Study
with Father John and Father Seraphim**

Great Lent

By Father Alexander Schmemmann

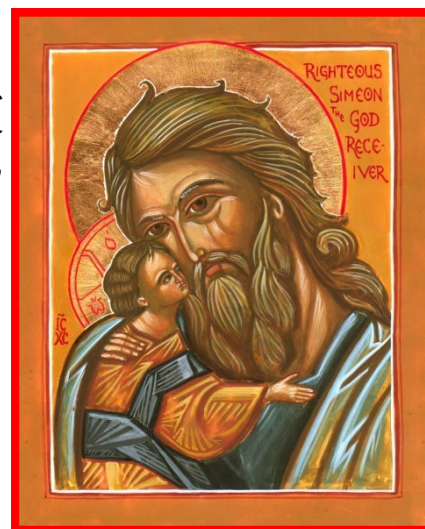
***Join us every Wednesday, February 3 through March 10
6:30 - 7:30 pm in Kokkos Hall***

This book is available in our Bookstore at the reduced price of \$12

We will wear face masks and practice social distancing

From Father John (Continued from Page 1)

St. Paul, while imprisoned for the Lord, wrote: *“Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 5:1-2)* During this “month of love” – emphasized by the celebration of Valentine’s Day – we must honestly look at ourselves and ask if we truly strive to imitate Christ by walking in the selfless love modeled by Him. If the answer is “No” – then why not? And if the answer is “Yes” – then why do we struggle with following God’s Commandments, favoring instead our own stubborn will? Why do we downplay humility, or even reject it as a weakness, insisting rather on our own way? And why are we, clergy and laity alike, continuously at war with obedience to our Heavenly God as well as the Earthly Parents, Government Officials and Spiritual Leaders He has put in charge over us? *(Ephesians 6:1, Romans 13:1, Hebrews 13:17)*



Beloved, our pride, ego, stubbornness, rebelliousness, and ungodly self-will – all which amount to “Doing It My Way” – are not the qualities that will lead us to the Paradise of God’s Kingdom: Rather, these are the hell-bound things that separated us from God in the first place and from which our Self-emptying Lord came to deliver us!

I pray that every one of us, like the faithful Elder Simeon and Prophetess Anna who met the Christ-child in the Temple, may earnestly desire to be like the sweet-smelling fragrance of holy incense, daily lifting our prayers and lives up to God, and through our voluntary concrete actions of genuine love and faithful servitude. May we also, like them and all the Holy Saints, strive more – with each minute we are granted in this life – to be guided by the Holy Spirit toward a more selfless, loving, merciful, humble, obedient and God-pleasing resolve, so that we may truly meet and unite ourselves with our Lord and Master each blessed day and in the ages to come. Amen.

With Much Love Always in Christ,

Father John

The Triodion Period

On Sunday, February 21, we enter the part of the liturgical year called the Triodion. Meaning “three odes,” the Triodion period consists of three sections: the pre-Lenten weeks, Great Lent itself, and Holy Week. Each of these weeks has its own theme, and the services and readings for each week reflect those themes.

The pre-Lenten weeks are meant to help us prepare for Lent, “that we may make a good beginning” in the coming season of repentance. The Sundays of pre-Lent are the Pharisee and the Publican, the Prodigal Son, the Last Judgment (Meatfare), and the casting of Adam and Eve from Paradise (Cheesefare and Forgiveness Sunday).

During the three weeks of this first portion of the Triodion Period:

- Various themes are presented to prepare us for the renewal, to get us thinking.
- We give special remembrance to those who have died.
- We prepare our bodies and stomachs to fast by gradually beginning to fast more thoroughly from various foods during various weeks.

We hear our Lord’s teaching about the topic of forgiveness, fasting and treasures. *(Matthew 6: 14-21)*

The Sundays of Lent are the Sunday of Orthodoxy, St. Gregory Palamas, the Veneration of the Holy Cross, St. John of the Ladder, and St. Mary of Egypt. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week, the third and final part of the Triodion.

During this period, the Church refers to the Lenten Triodion book for special hymns and services.

(From the website of St. Barnabas Orthodox Church, Costa Mesa, CA)

Parish Council Report

Greetings to all of our Saint John the Baptist Family!

As we approach February, the 2021 members of the Parish Council received the Oath of Office on Sunday, January 10 and held the annual Election of Officers. We are happy to have newly elected members – June Likourinou, Constantinos Kanis, Nicholas Barbarino, Spero Demoleas and Kouli Pouridis – who have joined returning members, John Koutsulis, Gus Flangas, John Matsis, Stacy Mavrantonis, Peter Papas, Alexander Mavros and Aristotelis Telly Eliades. The officers are: Gus Flangas, President; John Matsis, Vice President; June Likourinou, Secretary; John Koutsulis, Treasurer; and Nick Barbarino, Assistant Treasurer. I am sure that I speak for all of my fellow Parish Council Members when I say that it is our honor to serve our community and we look forward to a positive 2021.

It is impossible to report about the state of our Parish without including COVID 19 in the conversation. I am happy to report that, regarding the two loans that we secured through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), one has been fully forgiven as we have lived up to the requirements for loan forgiveness, and while the second loan is still under review, we are confident that it will be forgiven as well. With that being said, a new round of PPP loans is being offered and the Parish Council has initiated an application for this second round, which is very helpful during these trying financial times.

As Gus Flangas reported last month, despite the diminished revenue from collection trays and candles as well as the cancelation of the Greek Food Festival, Agape Picnic, and various events normally held in Panos Hall, our community has stepped up in increased stewardship contributions as well as miscellaneous donations. With gratitude to God for the generosity of so many, I am pleased to share that our Parish ended 2020 in the black!

We are thankful and now ask everyone to seriously consider what they can pledge for 2021, if they have not already done so, as the number of pledging Stewards is behind where it was this time last year. We remain optimistic that in the upcoming months, progress will be made as people are vaccinated and that we will soon be returning to normal Liturgical services without restrictions, our children will return to Church School on Sundays, and all our ministries will return in full force.

While we had previously scheduled the Greek Festival in May, under current circumstances that date is not realistic. In researching events taking place throughout Las Vegas in September, we have tentatively scheduled the Festival to take place *September 10-12*.

In closing, we ask for your continued prayers for those who have been stricken by this insidious virus and for a return to normalcy in 2021. As each day goes on, we are closer to the end of the pandemic.

John Matsis, Parish Council Vice-President



*“Welcome one another, therefore,
as Christ has welcomed you,
for the glory of God.”
(Romans 15:7)*

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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

Rev. Father John Hondros
frjohn@vegaskgreekorthodox.com

Rev. Father Seraphim Ramos
frseraphim@vegaskgreekorthodox.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.vegaskgreekorthodox.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: Demetrios 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

Dearest Sisters of Philoptochos and the St. John the Baptist Community,

While COVID continues to restrict many of our normal everyday activities, we are blessed to live in a city with beautiful weather. By taking a quiet walk we can boost our mood, improve mental sharpness and cultivate a deeper spiritual life. Let us all take advantage of the simple things in life.

Philoptochos Membership 2021: For those who are not members of the Ladies Philoptochos, please join the generations of women who have given their time and wisdom to make a difference in the St. John the Baptist Church and Community. You will find, as I have, that friendships made in Philoptochos are like no other – it is a true sisterhood. We enjoy a lot of laughter and fun conversation while helping those in need. In this issue (see Page 6) you will find the Philoptochos Stewardship Form for 2021. Please fill out the form and mail it to the Church with your check.



Vasilopita Cutting and St. Basil Collection: A special thank you to Dora Hart and Yiota Lieblen for making and providing the three large Vasilopites. The sweet and delicious breads, in honor of St. Basil the Great, were blessed, cut and distributed by Father John to the congregation. Due to your generosity, \$1,553 was collected in support of St. Basil's Academy in Garrison, NY. Thank you to Kiki Mavrantonis and Yiota for holding the collection baskets as well as to all those present for their love and generosity!

Departed Philoptochos Members Memorial – Sunday, February 7: In honor of our beloved departed members, let us remember that THEY are the ones who preserved and carried on to give us the sacred trust given to them by God to care for the poor, the young, the elderly, the sick, the orphaned, and the widowed.

Kids 'N' Cancer Collection – Sunday, February 21: The mission of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco Philoptochos Kids 'N' Cancer Ministry is to provide support for children afflicted with cancer and other life-threatening diseases. The Kids 'N' Cancer Camp Agape Ministry offers a life-changing, all-expense paid experience for children and their families. It provides opportunities for enjoyment, learning, and building self-esteem and confidence in a safe setting. The kindness and caring that surround the children who participate offer an ideal environment for therapy and healing. Please be generous!

The goal of the Christian life is to love. Let us each show love and kindness for others without any hope to gain something in return.

With Love in Christ, Benita Beeman, Philoptochos 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.

*“Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.”
(Romans 13:8)*



ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society ~ Panagia Chapter



PHILOPTOCHOS ~ FRIENDS OF THE POOR

Philoptochos Stewardship for 2021

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

National Philoptochos Commitment	\$15.00
Metropolis Philoptochos Commitment	\$15.00
St. John Church Panagia Chapter Minimum	<u>\$10.00</u>
TOTAL	\$40.00

Seniors ~ 65 Plus (\$5.00 discount)

Additional Donation \$_____

Total Enclosed \$_____

Please return to: St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
5300 South El Camino Road
Las Vegas, NV 89118

Attn: Ladies Philoptochos/Membership

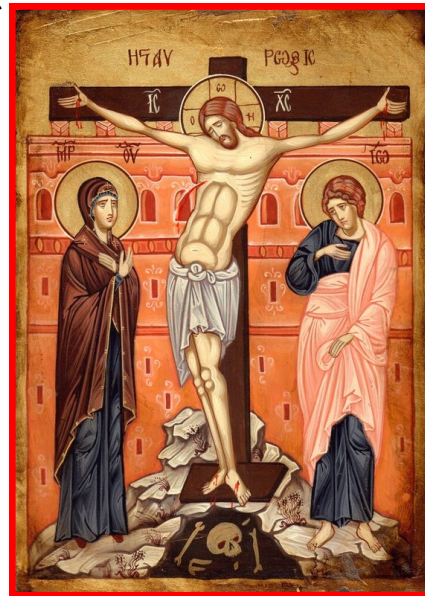
Make check payable to: Ladies Philoptochos Society

From Father Seraphim

In the past month the Ramos family underwent the trial of some bodily afflictions. A bad cough, a fever and aching body passed through the house and, after testing negative for COVID, we were nevertheless still stuck in a situation where I had almost complete care of the three kids for a few days. As I proceeded to try and care for Presvytera Olenka, and make food for, bathe, clothe and play with/entertain our 5, 3 and 1 year-olds, I had an extraordinary revelation of just how difficult the life of a mother can be. I mentioned the ordeal of taking care of the kids by myself – for only a few days, keep in mind – to a catechumen who reminded me that it is not only mothers and fathers who find themselves caring for those unable to care for themselves: Many people are intimately involved in the care of disabled, elderly or mentally handicapped loved ones and family members. Every single one of these unique situations require an immense amount of care, labor, patience and God's grace!

As we move into a new month and celebrate the *Meeting, or Encounter, of the Lord in the Temple on February 2*, I call to mind the reality of our God made flesh – born, circumcised, and presented in the Temple at Jerusalem at just forty days-old in accordance with the Law. (*Exodus 13:2*) God had become a real human child! The Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon (451) confirmed that not only was Jesus Christ consubstantial (*homoousios*) with His Father but he was also a partaker of our nature as well – consubstantial with us in His humanity, yet without sin. If Jesus really shared our flesh, if He really united His Divine *hypostases* (Greek for “person,” the Second Person of the Holy Trinity) with our human nature, then as a real human child He would have needed to be cared for! The Mother of God knew what it was like to nurse an infant and feed a child, to wake in the night, to clean and clothe and bathe the Boy who would grow into the Man Who would take away the sins of the world in His ministry, Death and Resurrection. Mary knew what it was like to care for others; she was no stranger to the stresses and burdens, the responsibility and the pain involved in really opening your heart and loving someone else.

The Panagia also knew what it was like to care for an elderly person: Joseph, her aged husband, who by the time Jesus' ministry began already passed from this life – there is no mention of him after the birth narratives and the event at the temple when Jesus was 12 years-old. (*Luke 2:41-52*) Joseph was a widower and much older than Mary, and this is where we get “*the brothers and sisters of Jesus*,” from Joseph's first marriage. (*Matthew 13:55-56*) The Virgin Mary's parents had died – being already past the age of child-bearing when she was conceived – and this left the young virgin quite vulnerable in 1st Century Roman-occupied Jewish society. Although they never consummated their God-arranged “marriage” (which was more of a guardianship of protection for a dedicated Temple Virgin), the Theotokos must have nevertheless felt the pangs of loss over the only other person besides her ever to have lived and tried to fulfill the role of being the Earthly Parent of God in the flesh. Jesus witnessed the self-sacrificial care of Joseph and Mary for Himself growing up, and for each other as Joseph aged and died. He in turn took it upon Himself to make sure that His own Mother was taken care of as He was departing this world. From the Cross, Christ entrusted His most beloved disciple with this sacred task: Giving the woman He respected and cherished most to John as his own mother, and John to her as Mary's own son. (*John 19:26*)



From these experiences of a real family life and from relationships with real people in history, Jesus came to expect a certain level of care and behavior from those who desired to follow after Him as Christians, as disciples who modeled themselves on His way of life and who loved Him: “*If you love me you will keep my commandments.*” (*John 14:15*) Self-sacrificial care for others – a very difficult, time-consuming, painful and prolonged activity and task – is a basic requirement for all Christians: “*I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.*” (*John 13:34-35*)

(Continued on Page 8)



Our Community Registry

Baptized into Christ: Na Mas Zisoun!

Antonios (Armani), son of Anton and Athena Pitts,
on January 16, 2021.

Godparents: Adam and Kassiani Bieker.

Evangelos, son of Constantine Kyriazopoulos and
DeChandra Busch Kyriazopoulos,
on January 23, 2021. Godparent: Maria Fotopoulos.

Christiana, daughter of Constantine Kyriazopoulos and DeChandra Busch Kyriazopoulos,
on January 23, 2021. Godparent: Maria Fotopoulos.

Fallen Asleep in the Lord

Zoe Chrystalla Gruber on January 5, 2021. Funeral on January 15.

Peter Takis Pappas on January 10, 2021. Funeral on January 18.

Apostolos P. Felecos on January 6, 2021. Funeral on January 22.

Theodore Maniatakos on January 20, 2021. Funeral on January 26 at St. Sophia Cathedral, Los Angeles

From Father Seraphim (Continued from Page 7)

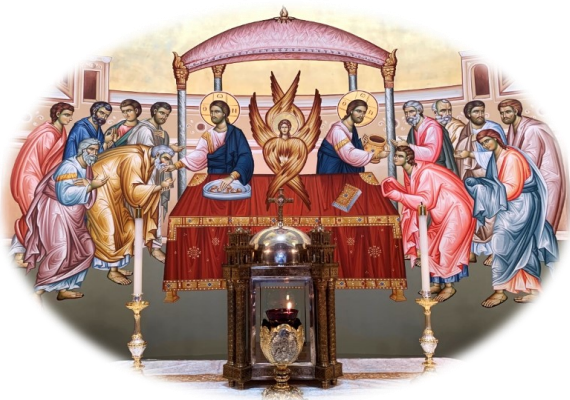
The earliest proponents and followers of "The Way" (*Acts 24:14*), as Christianity came to be known, continued in this vein by teaching that caring for each other is explicitly constitutive of being a Christian: *"Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Outdo one another in showing honor."* (*Romans 12:10*). *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ."* (*Ephesians 4:32*) *"Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ."* (*Galatians 6:2*) *"Since you have purified yourselves by your obedience to the truth, so that you show sincere brotherly love for each other, from a pure heart love one another constantly."* (*1 Peter 1:22*)

To conclude, I would like to show that concrete commands to care for others are neither merely a central concern to our Risen Lord and King, nor just applicable to Christians in the first century, but that every Saint in each generation has been concerned with the welfare of those around them. An example of one who lived and was perfected in our lifetime is the humble elder and Saint Porphyrios of Kapsokalyvia, Mt. Athos. He left Mt. Athos in his 20's and lived in different areas of Greece. In 1940 the priest-monk was assigned to the Polyclinic (Hospital) Church in Athens and served the sick there for thirty-three years! In his treasured book, *Wounded By Love*, St. Porphyrios left a stunning reflection under the chapter, "On Love for One's Neighbor": "Our every neighbor is 'flesh of our flesh.' Can I be indifferent towards him? Can I cause him distress? Can I hate him? This is the greatest mystery of our Church: That we all become one in God. Let's read the High Priestly prayer from the Gospel of John, *'... that they may be one as we are... that they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I in You... that they may be one even as You and I are one... that they may be made perfect in one... that where I am they may be with Me also.'* (*John 17:11, 21-24*) You see? He says it over and over again. He emphasizes the unity. We need all to be one with Jesus Christ as our Head! Just as Christ is one with the Father. This is where the profoundest depth of the mystery of the Church is concealed. No other religion says any such thing. No one else demands this refined sensibility which Christ demands for us all to become one by the grace of Christ. There is no room here for any separation or any fear. Neither death, the devil, nor hell. Only love, joy, peace, and the worship of God. You can reach the point where you then say with St. Paul: *'It is no longer I who live; Christ lives in me.'* (*Galatians 2:20*)"

With Love in Christ,

Father Seraphim

Stewardship and Community Outreach



Did you know that the actual Orthodox Christian feast day of St. Valentine is not February 14? On the Orthodox calendar we celebrate, not just one, but two saints named “Valentine” (Valentinos). They are from the ancient Church, and both are commemorated in the summer – July 6 and 30.

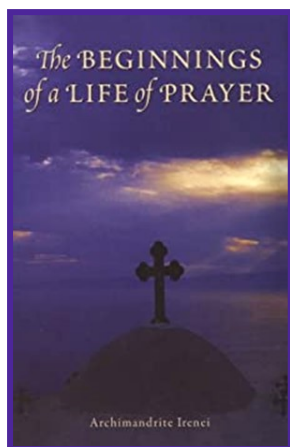
The first Valentinos was a Hieromartyr and Bishop, who became known as a marvelous steward of the Lord’s Holy Vineyard. The other Valentinos was a Priest who was known for defying an order of the emperor. This certain emperor forbade couples to marry, if the groom had not completed his military obligations. Of course, St. Valentinos rejected this law as it put the government in control of what should only be

overseen by the Church – and this is how the association between St. Valentinos with love and romance began. Sadly, today both Saints have been melded together as if they are one person.

Whatever the case, they are amazing holy models for us! Not because they are honored every year through giving of chocolates, flowers and romantic greeting cards – but because they gave everything, and even their lives, to serve Christ and His Holy Church. May we follow their example as being good, faithful and loving Stewards of Christ! Holy Saints, please pray to God for us!

In Christ, Justina Szukiewicz, on behalf of the Stewardship and Outreach Committee

Orthodox Bookstore



Greetings from the Bookstore! In about six weeks we will be entering into the most ascetically strenuous and prayerful time of our Ecclesiastical Year in Christ: Great Lent, the preparation for Holy Pascha. We usually think of *askesis* (spiritual exercise/discipline) in terms of fasting, vigils, alms and prostrations . . . but we must remember that prayer is an essential form of our *askesis*. This month’s selection, *The Beginnings of a Life of Prayer*, by Bishop Irenei, is a popular book on Father John’s “suggested reading” list in the Bookstore. Here is an excerpt from this excellent read:

“ . . . We must labor with active love to make of the soil of our heart a rich earth in which these beginnings of prayer flower into the fullness of communion with God. This will be a struggle and an act of ascetical labor, for in our day the “soil” into which the Word of God is cast is sadly deprived of nourishment and life. It is a soil that chokes our growth at every opportunity. The world today suffers from a sadly

debased understanding of prayer – and this at a time when it is most in need of its true depths. Prayer limps along on the weak, feeble limbs of conversation, dialogue, and mere discourse with God. It has become a thing of words, mirroring worldly conversations on divine themes; but it is not that which might push the heart to the lofty heights of true communion in the Holy Trinity, which might bring man to the direct embrace of God Himself.”

We live in challenging days with innumerable and competing draws on our time, thoughts, and attention. It can be a struggle to find time to struggle or “labor” in the way our Church doctor prescribes for the good health of our souls and toward prayerful union with God as described in the passage above. In preparation for our upcoming Lenten journey, if a consistent and solid prayer life has continued to evade you, perhaps consider picking up your copy of the book today and making a fresh start.

Friendly reminder to please make a Sunday appointment with me at paraskevilv1971@gmail.com or call Karen during weekdays. No walk-ins at this time – thank you for your understanding.

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



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: _____

Orthodox Christian: Yes No

Signed: _____

Orthodox Christian: Yes No

Others sharing in the gift (children): _____

With Gratitude to God for Our Pledged Stewards in 2021
If you wish to become a Parish Steward, please fill out Pledge Form and return to Karen

Acovino, Richard and Angela
 Adamy, Marina
 Alford, Cynthia "Mary"
 Alvarado, Jessie and
 Cokotis, Julie
 Anastasakis, Mark and Elaine
 Anastasiou, Andrew and
 Kathleen
 Andrews, Catherine
 Andrews, Chris and Pamela
 Andrews, George
 Andricopoulos, Margo
 Aristides, George and Diana
 Asim, Demetrios
 Bacon, Ken and Dianne
 Balason, Voula
 Balodimas, James
 Beeler, Mike and Carolyn
 Berendji, Jim and Vivian
 Bjorklund, Danielle
 Bledsoe, Lori
 Booth, Alina
 Bratta, Georgene
 Brennan, Peter and Maria
 Britten, Ronald and Carol
 Brown, Faye
 Bruninga, Bill and Erin
 Carabas, Stephen and Linda
 Carahalios, John and Constance
 Caredis, Jon and Marjorie
 Carrico, William and Alexandra
 Carter, Maria
 Chachas, Bessie
 Chachas, James
 Chagares, Kiki
 Chamie, Elie, Emil and Claudine
 Chandrinou, Alexia
 Chanos, Jennifer
 Chomakos, Dean and Tammy
 Chondrakos, Dimosthenis and
 Kragerud, Kaaren
 Christou, Toni
 Collins, David
 Conger, William and Alexia
 Costacos, John
 Costuros, George and Marsha
 Cosulas, Fr. Basil and
 Presv. Samantha
 Cotsilis, Jenny
 Crist, Adam and Kanistra
 Dalacas, Dimitri and Athanasia
 Demas, Spiro and Rita
 Doskas, Athanasios and Anastasia

Earl, Christine Michaelides
 Eliades, Harry and Agapi
 Eliades, Katerina
 Eliakis, Varthie and LeeAnn
 Eyler, Fr. Paul and Presv. Ilean
 Eyler, John and Elizabeth
 Farren, Anthony and Maritsa
 Fenlason, Nathan and
 Zmina-Fenlason, Jennifer
 Fischer, Cheryl
 Fitzgerald, Norman and
 McCullen, Sandra
 Flangas, Gus and Tamara
 Flangas, Marilyn
 Fletes, Richard and
 Herzig, Stephanie
 Foster, Kyle and
 Pierro, Maria Elena
 Gauvin, Chad and Marissa
 Gekakis, George
 Ghebreab, Daniel and
 Ghermay, Selam
 Gialketsis, William
 Goodman, Robert and Linda
 Gordon, Victor and Demetria
 Gutierrez, Connie
 Gutierrez, Daniel
 Hall, Elizabeth
 Hamilton, Mary
 Hamilton, Paul and Brandi
 Hastings, Teri
 Hemmers, Oliver and
 Pantelas, Anne
 Hoadrea, Jimmy and Monci
 Hondros, Christopher and
 Darlene
 Hondros, Fr. John and
 Presv. Maria
 Hondros, Marissa
 Houlis, Ila and Debbie
 Howard, William and Willie
 Iteen, Robert and Sophia
 Jensen, Matthew and Michelle
 Kachikis, Ernestine
 Kambouris, Litsa
 Kanis, Constantinos and Katie
 Karas, James
 Karas, John and Marcie
 Katsaros, Thomas and Sharon
 Kelesis, Paula
 Kirollos, Elhamy and
 Molina, Adriana
 Kleanthis, George and Zanetta

Kolev, Plamen and
 Koleva, Slaveya
 Koliambas, Eleni
 Kontos, Diana
 Kostas, James
 Koutsulis, John and Eileen
 Koutsulis, Sam and Effie
 Kyriannis, Justin and Linda
 Lakkis, Christina
 Lambros, Kyriakos and Mary
 Latelle, Penny
 Lavine, Frederic
 Lee, David and Alexandra
 Lekar, Michael and Effie
 Leone, Stephen
 Leonis, Nick and Sophia
 Leonis, Tishe
 Leventis, Nicholas and Christina
 Likourinou, Steve and June
 Litsos, Nicholas and Catherine
 Malamatos, Kindina
 Maland, Donna
 Manos, Constantine and Michele
 Matsis, John and Rebecca
 McManus, Jeanette
 McKinney, Michael and Mersene
 McSweeney, Farolyn
 Menegatos, James
 Merritt, Devin and Sonia
 Moffett, Todd and
 Eliopoulos, Tina
 Monoyudis, Jim and Julie
 Moore, Brenda
 Murray, Christopher and
 George, Veneta
 Myers, Stella
 Neocleous, Plato
 Nicholas, Christina
 Nicholas, John and Estella
 Nixon, John and Ellyn
 Paikos, Tom and Elizabeth
 Pajak, Scott and Angela
 Pandelis, Cheryl
 Panos, Jeanne
 Papalois, John and Maria
 Papas, Christian and Nicole
 Papas, Peter and Rita
 Pappas, Panagiotis and Andrea
 Pappas, Stella
 Paschalis, Evangelos and Maria
 Pendleton, Tricia
 Pertsinides, Irene
 Petersen, Todd and Diane

Petriuc, Constantin
 Petrou, Jim and Penelopi
 Philippou, Demetrios and
 Luanne
 Pierro, Joe and Rhonda
 Polimerou, Angeline
 Politis, Pantelis and Dimitra
 Pouridis, Kouli and Para
 Powers, Russell and Rebecca
 Ramos, Fr. Seraphim and
 Presv. Olenka
 Raptis, Presv. Evonne
 Rasmussen, Scott and Rebecca
 Rigas, Anthony and Mary
 Rihani, Gary and Linda
 Rivera, Elias and April
 Rodis, Dimitri and Angie
 Rosenthal, Joseph and Stephanie
 Rotas, Beatrice
 Ruffner, Skip and Kathy
 Salonikis, Valentinos and Sophia
 Santamaria, Jennifer and Robert
 Savvas, Savva
 Sechrist, Carl and Christine
 Setian, Gary and Marie
 Skalkotos, Nikolas and Georgia
 Smith, Kathleen
 Snow, Clifford and Christina
 Snowden, Robert and Niki
 Staubs, Douglas and Anastasia
 Stenos, Louis
 Szukiewicz, Joseph and Justina
 Tafoya, Steven and Irene
 Tasios, Ramona and Pete
 Theros, James and Kathryn
 Thompson, Maggy
 Tohme, Tony and May
 Wallace, Robert and Katerina
 Walter, Vernon and Alice
 Wells, Adrienne
 Wilson, Lori
 Wilson, Steven and Cleo
 Womack, Karl
 Womack, Kimberly
 Wronski, Chuck
 Xerogiannes, Nick and Nikki
 Zaferatos, Ted
 Zarras, Nick and Chery
 Zimmerman, Paul and Angela



*You sanctified the virginal womb by Your Birth, O Lord, and blessed the hands of
 Symeon fittingly, O Christ God; and even now You came and saved us.
 Now, give peace to our nation in time of war, and empower our leaders,
 so loved by You, the only One Who loves mankind. (Kontakion for the Meeting of Our Lord)*

Ministry News

Church School

Hi Everyone! I hope we are all staying healthy and doing well in school.

As there are still restrictions on Church gatherings, we are currently unable to offer Sunday Church School Classes. We continue to email on a weekly basis the *Children's Bulletin* as well as the *Orthodox Journeys* lesson plans for each grade level. Each weekly lesson is derived from the Orthodox Church Calendar, and this is an excellent resource of spiritual instruction for both children and their parents. If you are not receiving these lessons, please contact Karen at the Church Office and she will put you on our email list.

The *Faithtree Relationship Project* for teens has concluded and, based on the positive response, Father John and Father Seraphim will offer starting this month a six-week in-person class for our youth in 6th through 12th grades on Great Lent. More information below.

For the other grade levels, we will keep everyone posted on when we will get to do in-person meetings and lessons on Sundays again. I hope to see you all soon – if not in Church School, then in Church at the Liturgy. Please reach out if you need anything – including other online Orthodox resources.

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

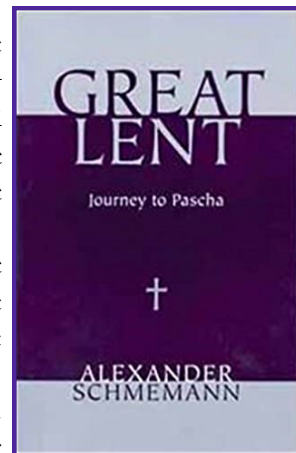
Teen Class on Great Lent

Due to the positive response and in-person participation by our teens in *The Faithtree Relationship Project*, we invite all students 6th – 12th Grade in our Parish to participate in a six-week spiritual course in preparation for the holiest period of the Church Year. We will meet *on Wednesdays, February 3 – March 10, 5:00 – 6:00 pm, in Kokkos Hall.*

We will be teaching the deep significance of the Lenten Season in the Orthodox Faith: The period leading up to and through the Journey of Great Lent – which leads us to Holy Week and the Resurrection. We will be utilizing the book *Great Lent* by Father Alexander Schmemmann, which is available for a discounted price of \$12 in our Bookstore. Also, we ask that you please bring a pen and journal and we will watch supplementary videos.

This class is open to all our teens, whether or not you participated in the previous class. Please RSVP with Father Seraphim or Karen, so we can arrange the class accordingly for social distancing. Face masks will be worn, and we can provide a faith-based mask if you do not have one.

We ask that you please arrive on time so we can begin promptly at 5:00 pm. We sincerely thank the teens who attended the Relationship Project and hope to see many more of you at our next class. Love, Father John and Father Seraphim



Young Adults



In January we tried to have an in-person gathering but due to a handful of conflicts we did not have as large of a crowd as we hoped. Therefore, this month we will challenge you to block off *Saturday, February 27 from noon to 2:00 pm* as we come together in a responsible and safe manner and play indoor soccer! We will gather at Indoor 5 Soccer (7770 Dean Martin Drive, #307, Las Vegas [Inside Phase 1]) for some exercise, friendly competition and a few special challenges. Please bring a good attitude and a competitive spirit!

More information is available at <https://indoor5.com/>. We hope to see you there! In Christ, Father Seraphim

Ministry News

Orthodox Family Fellowship & GOYA: Combined February Events



Greetings in the Lord!

Due to the overwhelmingly positive response with so many kids and families participating in our Rock Climbing event in January, we will continue to meet in a responsible and safe manner.

This month we will come together and play indoor soccer! Please join us *on Sunday, February 28 at 1:00 pm at Indoor 5 Soccer* (7770 Dean Martin Drive, #307, Las Vegas [Inside Phase 1]) for some exercise, friendly competition and a few special challenges.



Moreover, as the venue is owned by a parishioner, we will even experience a business blessing with Holy Water together with Father John before we play! More information is available at <https://indoor5.com/>.

For those not yet ready to venture out into public gatherings, please join us for a *combined Zoom Meeting and Discussion on Sunday, February 21 at 3:00 pm*. We will share ideas about how to engage in Lent. Please look for more information in the *Weekly Bulletin*.

Love in Christ, Father Seraphim

Greek School

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. 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

AHEPA SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE!



AHEPA 314 is pleased to announce that it will again offer a scholarship for high school seniors entering college or current college undergraduate students. Information is available at <https://www.facebook.com/LVAHEPA314>. You can also request a copy of the application from Karen in the Church Office. The deadline for submissions is *April 3, 2021*.

You will also find a link to the Chapter website where you can make a donation to the Scholarship Fund or pay your dues. Please email us at ahepa314@gmail.com if you are interested in becoming involved with AHEPA.

Steve Liaos, AHEPA President

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.



2021 Stewardship Report (as of 1/26/21)

Stewardship Gifts Pledged: \$233,566 (\$313,627 in 2020)
 Stewardship Gifts Received: \$79,652 (\$66,601 in 2020)
 Unfulfilled Pledge Balance: \$153,914 (\$247,026 in 2020)
 Stewardship Families Pledged: 191 (213 in 2020)
 Average Pledge to Date: \$1,223 (\$1,472 in 2020)
 2021 Budgeted Goal: \$500,000 ... Keep the Pledges Coming!

Church Account Summaries - December 2020

Nevada State Bank Accounts	November	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	December	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
General Operating Account (GOA)	\$52,740.68	\$56,454.87	\$749.82	\$19,539.05	\$61,864.06	\$28,542.26	
Community and Education (C&E)	\$1,673.17					\$1,673.17	
Greek Food Festival (GFF)	\$266.47	\$150.00			\$15.00	\$401.47	
Designated, Restricted & Other (DR&O)	\$223,867.21	\$4,244.00			\$811.96	\$227,299.25	All expenses were for Bookstore merchandise and Bookstore merchant credit card fees.
Folk Dance Group	\$17,966.00					\$17,966.00	
Hellenic Historical Society	\$3,292.94					\$3,292.94	
Designated Funds	November	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	December	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Bookstore	\$5,175.34	\$3,234.00			\$811.96	\$7,597.38	
Ornaments	\$1,169.41					\$1,169.41	
Restricted Funds	November	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	December	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
ICON	\$140,366.44	\$10.00				\$140,376.44	
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	\$1,000.00				\$26,169.26	
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	
Designated, Restricted, and Other Total	\$223,867.21	\$4,244.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$811.96	\$227,299.25	
Other Funds	November	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	December	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Kokkos Scholarship Fund	\$72,126.26		\$6,246.07			\$78,372.33	Increase in value to the account

December 2020 Candles **\$4,231.00**
 December 2020 Trays **\$3,772.00**
Total December Candles & Trays \$8,003.00



FEBRUARY 2021 ~ IN THE YEAR OF THE LORD

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

	1		2 <i>Meeting of Our Lord in the Temple</i> 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy	3 5:00 pm Teen Class: Great Lent 6:30 pm Adult Study Class: Great Lent	4	5	6
7 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	8		9 6:00 pm Parish Council Meeting in Kokkos Hall 6:00 pm Philoptochos Zoom Meeting	10 <i>St. Haralambos</i> 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy 5:00 pm Teen Class 6:30 pm Adult Study	11	12	13
14 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	15		16	17 5:00 pm Teen Class 6:30 pm Adult Study	18	19	20
21 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy 3:00 pm OFF & GOYA Zoom Meeting <i>Triodion Begins</i>	22		23	24 5:00 pm Teen Class 6:30 pm Adult Study	25	26	27 12:00 pm Young Adults at Indoor5 Soccer
28 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy 1:00 pm GOYA & OFF at Indoor5 Soccer				<i>Fast-free Week</i>			

The Desert Messenger

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

The Way of the Lord

*“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.
Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.
Live in harmony with one another;
do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; never be conceited.
Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.
If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all.
... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
(Romans 12:14-18, 21)*

