

The Desert



Messenger

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

Volume 20, Issue 4 St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Las Vegas, NV

April 2022

From
Father
John

Beloved in Christ:

Καλή Ανάσταση! Blessed Resurrection!

We have turned the curve with three weeks of Lent remaining, and our focus during the Great Fast is now on the Life-Giving Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. With the completion of the forty-day Lenten Fast, we will enter into the prelude to Holy Week with Saturday of Lazaros and Palm Sunday – and both of these special days will set the spiritual tone for Holy Week. We are grateful and blessed that *His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos will be present with us on Saturday, April 16 for the Great Vespers of Palm Sunday at 6:00 pm, and on Sunday, April 17 for the Orthros of Palm Sunday at 8:45 am, the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy at 10:00 am, and the First Bridegroom Service at 7:00 pm.* I pray that you and your loved ones will be present for these services, to prepare for your Holy Week journey, and to receive the grace of the Holy Sacraments as well as the blessing of His Eminence.

During *Great and Holy Week* – with its many, many powerful hymns, Scriptural readings and liturgical actions – we will focus on the themes of the Second Coming of Christ and our need for spiritual vigilance in the Bridegroom Services; our healing of mind, body and soul in the Sacrament of Holy Unction; our Lord's washing of His Disciples' feet, Institution of the Eucharist, and Betrayal on Holy Thursday morning; His Holy Passion and Crucifixion on Holy Thursday evening; His Death and Removal from the Cross on Holy Friday afternoon; His Burial with the Lamentations on Holy Friday evening; His Descent into Hades on Holy Saturday morning; and His glorious and victorious third-day Resurrection at the midnight *Anastasi* service of *Great and Holy Pascha on Sunday, April 24.*

One of the highlights of Holy Pascha – after, of course, the lighting of our Paschal Candles, and proclaiming in hymns Christ's victory over death – is the reading of the Paschal Homily of St. John Chrysostom: *Whoever may be spent from fasting, enjoy now your reward. Whoever has toiled from the first hour, receive today your just settlement. If any came after the third hour, celebrate gratefully. If any of you arrived after the sixth, have no misgivings, you have lost nothing. If some have been as late as the ninth, come forward, do not be at a loss. If any of you have arrived only at the eleventh hour, do not be dismayed for being late. The Master is gracious: He accepts the last even as the first....*

St. John Chrysostom's timeless homily is based on the *Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard*. (Matthew 20:1-16) Like the laborers of the first hour who worked for the same wage as those worked at the

eleventh, we who have fasted from the beginning of Lent might be thinking: *"These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat."* (Matthew 20:12) And for all of us who judge, are envious, or compare ourselves with others, the Lord gives this response: *"Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to Me?"* (Continued on Page 3)



WORSHIP SCHEDULE

*Sundays: 8:45 am Orthros ~ 10:00 am Divine Liturgy
Church School follows Holy Communion*

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

Friday, April 1

6:30 pm Fourth Salutations to the Theotokos

Sunday, April 3/4th Sunday of Lent/St. John
Climacos/St. Niketas the Confessor/St. Joseph the
Hymnographer

Orthros: Tone Eight (Fourth Plagal)

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

Epistle: Hebrews 6:13-20

Gospel: Mark 9:17-31

Monday, April 4

6:00 pm Great Compline

Wednesday, April 6

6:00 pm Presanctified Liturgy

Friday, April 8

*6:30 pm The Akathist Hymn to
the Theotokos*

Sunday, April 10/5th Sunday of Lent/ St. Mary of
Egypt/Ss. Raphael, Nicholas and Irene the Martyrs/
St. Terrence and His Companions

Orthros: Tone One

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

Epistle: Hebrews 9:11-14

Gospel: Mark 10:32-45

Artoclasia (Dimos Chondrakis, for his Name Day)

Monday, April 11

6:00 pm Great Compline

Wednesday, April 13

6:00 pm Presanctified Liturgy

Saturday, April 16/ Saturday of Lazaros

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy

Epistle: Hebrews 12:28-29; 13:1-8

Gospel: John 11:1-45

Palm Cross Tying follows

*6:00 pm Great Vespers of Palm Sunday with
His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos*

Sunday, April 17/Palm Sunday

His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos, Celebrant

Festal Gospel: Matthew 11:1-11, 15-17

Epistle: Philippians 4:4-9

Gospel: John 12:1-18

Blessing and Distribution of Palms

Palm Sunday Luncheon in Panos Hall

GREAT AND HOLY WEEK

7:00 pm 1st Bridegroom Service

with His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos

Holy Monday, April 18

7:00 pm 2nd Bridegroom Service

Holy Tuesday, April 19

7:00 pm 3rd Bridegroom Service/Hymn of Kassiani

Holy Wednesday, April 20

9:00 am Presanctified Liturgy

7:00 pm Sacrament of Holy Unction

Holy Thursday, April 21

9:00 am Vespertal Liturgy of St. Basil

7:00 pm Holy Passion of our Lord/12 Gospel Readings

Holy Friday, April 22

10:00 am Royal Hours

3:00 pm Removal of Christ from the Cross

7:00 pm Lamentations

Holy Saturday, April 23

9:00 am Vespertal Liturgy of St. Basil

11:00 pm Vigil of the Resurrection

Sunday, April 24/GREAT AND HOLY PASCHA

12:00 am Resurrectional Orthros and

Divine Liturgy

Resurrection Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

Epistle: Acts 1:1-8

Gospel: John 1:1-17

Blessing of Red Eggs

12:00 pm Agape Vespers and Agape Picnic

Gospel: John 20:19-25 (In Various Languages)

WORSHIP SCHEDULE *(Continued from Page 2)*

Monday, April 25/ *St. George the Great Martyr*

8:00 am *Orthros*

9:00 am *Divine Liturgy*

Epistle: Acts 12:1-11

Gospel: John 1:18-28

Friday, April 29/ *Our Most Holy Lady Theotokos, the Life-Giving Spring*

8:00 am *Orthros*

9:00 am *Divine Liturgy*

Epistle: Acts 3:1-8

Gospel: John 2:12-22

Sunday, May 1/ *Sunday after Pascha/*

Holy Apostle Thomas/Jeremiah the Prophet

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

Epistle: Acts 5:12-20

Gospel: John 20:19-31

Good-Bye Luncheon for Father Seraphim

*Christ is Risen from the dead,
by Death trampling down upon death,
And to those in the tombs
He has granted Life.*



Baptized into Christ

Daminana (Amalia) Pema (Adult Baptism) on March 20, 2022.

Godparent: Paola Trebicka.

Marriage: Na Zisetel

Robert Soper, III and Kimberly Coletti on March 5, 2022.

Koumbara: Romina Chomakos.

Fallen Asleep in the Lord

Glenda (Glykeria) Eliakis on March 8, 2022. Funeral on March 21.

Lee Ann (Anna) Eliakis on March 14, 2022. Funeral on March 21.

From Father John (Continued from Page 1)

The Great Feast of Pascha means so much more than the breaking of the long fast, or the end of multiple prostrations, long prayers and confessions: Most significant is that Holy Pascha celebrates the free gift of Eternal Life granted to the world through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ – from those who have labored in the Faith from the beginning of their life to those who have “discovered” and were Baptized into the Church later in life. We fast during Lent because we need to return to God; we feast on Pascha because God is gracious to all of us, regardless of who we are, where we came from, or when we embraced His Holy Church: We are loved and rewarded equally because of His Love! Therefore, in the words of St. John Chrysostom, “*The Kingdom of Heaven is pure from envy and jealousy.*”

Beloved, let us be grateful to God for granting us freely during Lent and Holy Week the opportunity to return to Him – and indeed, to our true selves, through this season of repentance, forgiveness, purification, spiritual growth, and victory over sin and death: Moreover, let us rejoice and give thanks always for His enduring goodness, love, and mercy to all of us!

Love Always in the Crucified and Risen Christ,

Father John



Parish Council Report

Reverend Fathers, Parish Council Members, Church Ministries and Beloved Parishioners:

Kalo Pascha and Kali Anastasi! As we look toward the Resurrection of our Lord, I want you to know that the Parish Council is preparing to have all members ready to ensure the safety of all parishioners and an orderly plan to accommodate everyone. I encourage all parish members to be present for the last few weeks of Lenten services and especially for the beautiful and uplifting services of Holy Week and Pascha.

As you may already know, His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos will officiate over the Great Vespers and Hierarchical Divine Liturgy on Palm Sunday, and the First Bridegroom Service of Holy Week. Parents, please encourage your children to attend, participate and meet with His Eminence. It is important for him to see that our children and young adults are fully engaged during these Holy Days. We will be hosting our Palm Sunday Luncheon again this year *on Sunday, April 17* – the price is \$15 per person, and you can pay at the door.

As we prepare for Holy Pascha and the Agape Picnic *on Easter Sunday, April 24*, we need your help! Please see Demetrious Asim, Stephanie Demoleas or Steve Tzelalis to help with this traditional feast. There is a great amount of planning and work that is involved with this event – and we are grateful for our committee, along with Savva Savvas for all their work behind the scenes. We have a strong community and there is no reason to look outside of our parishioners to hire help: We can reduce our costs and more importantly offer our services and thanks to God by volunteering our time.

Your attendance at the Agape Picnic is strongly encouraged, and I want to thank you in advance for making this celebration a memorable one. The cost for the picnic is \$25 per person and \$250 per table, and tickets *will not* be sold at the door. Tickets are now available, and early purchases will secure your seating preference and afford us the opportunity to order the proper amounts of food and beverage. Music will be provided and donated by Steve Likourinou and family: Thank you Steve for always stepping up and providing your service to the Church!

Lastly, for now, due to hall refurbishments in the very near future, we will not be renting out our Church facilities. We will honor existing rental contracts through July 23, 2022.

We hope to see all of you, your families and friends in attendance in Church for these Holy Days. Wishing all a Blessed Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In Christ, John Fotopoulos, Parish Council President

Stewardship and Community Outreach

Our journey toward Pascha winds down in April this year. Twelve weeks of repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and study comprise this long journey toward Resurrection Sunday, the Feast of feasts of our Church year. Modern-day experience could equate this journey with a good old-fashioned road trip: The pre-Lenten, Lenten, and Holy Week Church services and activities help equip and guide us. Luckily, Holy Scripture and Church Wisdom have maintained the Truth (directions) necessary to successfully navigate ourselves along the Way.

However, problems can arise when people do not wish to be in the driver's seat for their own journey – trying, instead, to take this road trip in a carpool. Some may doze off and miss the beauty along the way, some may ignore the route and get lost in the world, and others may become ill due to focusing on something besides the path forward.

The Good News is that God (and the Church) meets us where we are: If we are uncertain of the route, if we missed taking the trip for a couple of years, if we have a habit of taking shortcuts . . . not to worry! A complete, guided excursion is offered to everyone annually!

And, lest we find ourselves without wheels, or cannot afford today's \$5 per gallon gas, we all know that road trips, even a road trip to Emmaus, can be accomplished humbly on foot.

In Christ, Mike Beeler, Stewardship and Outreach Committee



Philoptochos News

Dear Father John, Father Seraphim, Lovely Philoptochos Members, and Fellow Sisters and Brothers of Our Beloved Faith:

As I write this we are in the middle of our Lenten journey – praying, fasting, and giving our time and talents to each other and our Church. As we watch what is transpiring in Ukraine, we must pray for those who are being persecuted for no other reason than being prosperous, happy and successful. We can only pray that by the time that you are reading this that all has been resolved. If you would like to donate to the Ukrainians, may I suggest that the IOCC as an excellent resource. Thank you, dear friends, for your prayers and support for our Ukrainian friends.



Here in Las Vegas, we are beginning the countdown to Pascha. The Ladies Philoptochos Society is now collecting your donations for the flowers for the season. Please look for the special envelopes to make your donations, in memory of a loved one for this holy time.

As usual during this time of the year, we are selling tickets for one of our most popular raffles – the Wine Wagon! For only a \$5 donation you have a chance to win a wagon loaded with bottles of wine. (Members: Please remember to bring your wine to Church! Two Bottles of your favorite vino, at a \$10 value each please.) The Drawing will be at the Agape Picnic *on Sunday, April 24*. These donations will help our Orthodox ministries and causes.

To our members of Philoptochos and those interested in helping, here are some dates to remember:

Saturday, April 9 – Baking Day: Koulourakia and Kourambiethes in the Church Kitchen for the Agape Picnic.

Saturday of Lazaros, April 16, following the Divine Liturgy: Setting the tables for the Palm Sunday Luncheon.

Palm Sunday, April 17, following the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy: Palm Sunday Luncheon with His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos.

Holy Thursday, April 21, following the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil: The tradition of the Red Eggs – help is needed oiling and polishing the eggs.

Holy Friday, April 22, following the Royal Hours: Decorating the Kouvouklion – please dress appropriately in dark colors as we prayerfully adorn our Lord's Tomb.

Holy Saturday, April 23, following the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil: Packing the sweets for the Agape Picnic, packaging the red eggs, and preparing the pastry table.

Holy Pascha, April 24 – Agape Picnic: Members, please sign up for a one-hour shift.

This is your personal invitation to come and participate, meet some ladies of the Church, roll a cookie, pray, or just have a giggle. All are welcome!

Dear Members, please remember to check your email for updates on the “doings” of the Ladies Philoptochos. We are collecting bras for Project 150 now until the end of the month. If you are not receiving the emails, please let us know.

An update on the Kids ‘n’ Cancer Fundraiser: This year the St. John the Baptist Community was so very generous that we will be able to meet our goal of \$5,000! Many thanks once again to everyone who donated – and to Cheryl Pandelis, who spearheaded the campaign. We all will be creating lots of happy memories for a lifetime for someone’s child.

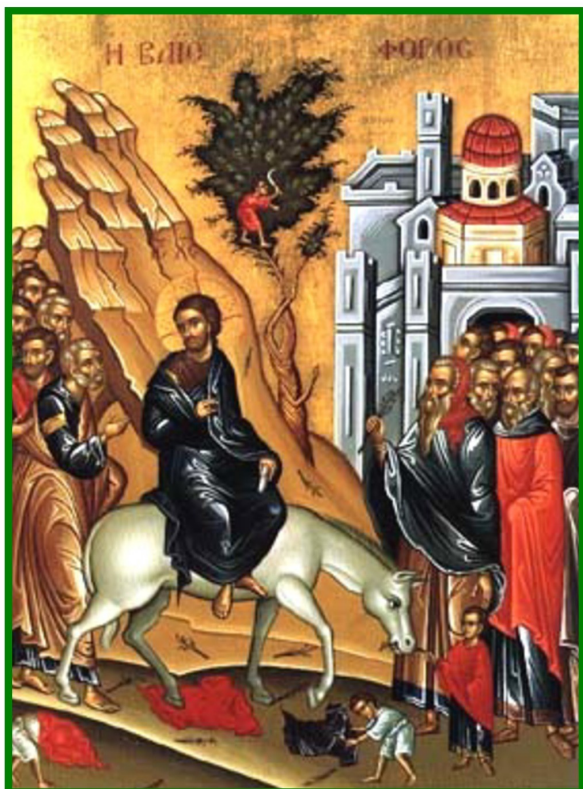
As always, I give thanks personally to each of you.

Your Sister in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Bernadette Anthony, Philoptochos President

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 during Holy Week.

You and your family are cordially invited
to join His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos
for the Annual



Palm Sunday Fish Luncheon

Sunday, April 17, 2022

Following the
Hierarchical Divine Liturgy
in Panos Hall

Menu:

Baked Fish Plaki and Rice,
Salad, Fresh Baked Bread
and Dessert

\$15 per Person

Cash Bar: Beer and Wine





Please Join Us for Our
AGAPE PICNIC
Holy Pascha Sunday, April 24, 2022
St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
12:00 noon to 4:00 pm
(Agape Vespers at noon, followed by the Picnic)



*Tickets are \$25
for either Traditional
Lamb or Chicken
Dinner Plate or
Specialty Item 4-Pack
(Spanakopita, Tyropita,
Kreatopita and Pastitsio)*

- ♦ *Greek Pastries and Bar*
- ♦ *Greek Music*
- ♦ *Easter Egg Hunt at 2:00 pm*
- ♦ *Table Reservations are Available and Encouraged*

Χριστός Ανέστη! Christ is Risen!

*For tickets and table reservations, please call
Karen at the Church Office (702) 221-8245*

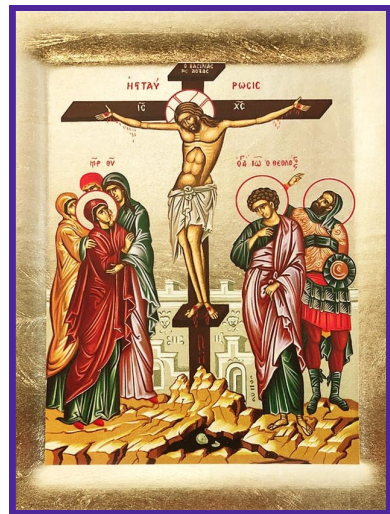


Great and Holy Week Services

During Palm Sunday weekend – *April 16-17* – our Parish will be blessed with the presence of His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos for the services of Saturday evening Palm Sunday Vespers, Palm Sunday morning Orthros and Hierarchical Divine Liturgy and the First Bridegroom (*Nymphios*) Service that evening. Great and Holy Week actually begins with the Orthros of Holy Monday – known as the Bridegroom Service – on Palm Sunday evening: For three nights we have our eyes fixed on the icon of Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church, in the center of the Soleas – although this is an image of our Lord clothed in a scarlet robe, crowned with thorns, hands bound, and holding a reed. The hymns and readings of these services set the stage for our Lord's Passion, while simultaneously making us mindful of His imminent Second Coming:

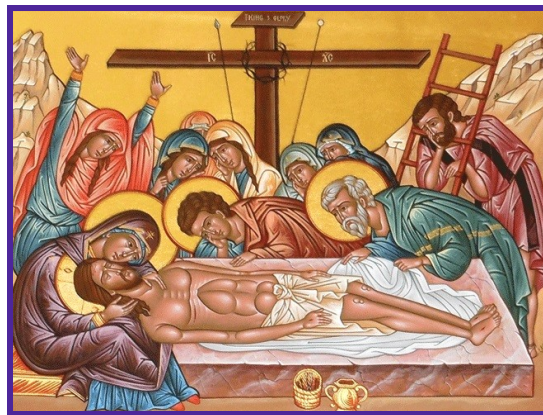
“Behold, the Bridegroom approaches in the middle of the night, and blessed is the one He finds awake and waiting.”

In the Greek Orthodox practice, the Sacrament of Holy Unction is placed mid-week and, as a service of healing, its link to Christ's Passion is indisputable: We humans are sick – physically, emotionally and spiritually – as a result of Adam and Eve's Fall and the perpetual sinfulness of each generation. In the seventh and final Gospel reading of the service, the Lord's words are directed to each of us: *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.” (Matthew 9:12)* All of us are in desperate need of the healing and redemption of our Great Physician, Jesus Christ, and as we shall see within a day, *“with His stripes we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5)*



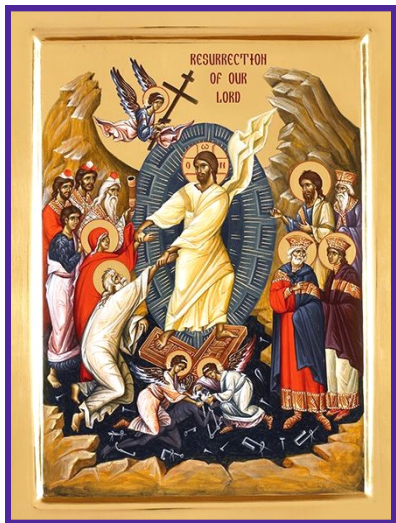
Holy Thursday is the turning point of Holy Week: Although the services become more powerful and admittedly much longer, the saving works of our Lord accelerate rapidly – within twelve hours we witness in hymns, readings and liturgical actions our Lord Jesus Christ washing the feet of His Disciples, instituting the Mystical Supper (the Eucharist), as well as His betrayal by Judas Iscariot, His agony in the garden of Gethsemane, His arrest, trial, mocking and scourging, His death sentence and, at the climax, His voluntary Crucifixion for the salvation of the world. That evening, after the fifth of twelve Gospel readings, the priest carries the Lord's Cross, just as Simon of Cyrene, and after placing the Crucified Lord in the midst of the faithful, he solemnly intones, *“We worship Your Passion, O Christ. Show us now Your glorious Resurrection.”*

On the most solemn day of the year, Holy Friday, our faithful are encouraged to take an additional day off from school and work to be present for the beautiful and spiritually stirring services. At the mid-afternoon service the priest reads the long Gospel passage recounting the Lord's Crucifixion and Death, and toward the end he pauses to bring the narrative home: He goes before the Cross, prostrates himself and then solemnly removes our Lord, wraps Him in a linen shroud, and places Him in the Altar, which becomes His Tomb. Shortly after, the priest processes the *Epitaphios* (the cloth icon of the Entombed Lord) around the Church and then gently lays Him in the Sepulcher. That night, the faithful gather in the Church for the Funeral of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with candles in hand all chant the Lamentations: *“In a grave they laid You, O my life and my Christ; and the armies of the angels were quite amazed, as they sang the praise of Your submissive love.”*



(Continued on Page 9)

Great and Holy Week Services (Continued from Page 8)



The Vespers Liturgy of Holy Saturday morning is replete with joyful anticipation, especially with the inspired and spirited chanting of our Youth Choir: Many prophecies from the Old Testament are read, prefiguring Christ's Resurrection on the third day and His power over Death. Just before the reading of the Holy Gospel, the priest sprinkles bay leaves all around the Church – as a symbol of Christ's victory – while chanting triumphantly: *“Arise, O God, and judge the earth, for You shall bring all nations to Your inheritance!”* Much later that night, a multitude will assemble in the darkened Church and in the overflow section under the tent outside: If there is one service people will attend in a year, this is it, for all Orthodox Christians embrace Great and Holy Pascha as the Feast of all feasts.

At midnight the Royal Doors are quickly opened and the priest lights the large Paschal Candle from the solitary flame of the Altar vigil lamp, and then raises it before the faithful, – as a visual expression that our Risen Christ has overcome the bonds of Hades and Death – proclaiming in chant, *“Come, receive the light from the Light that is never overtaken by night and glorify Christ, Who is risen from the dead!”*

May We All Have a Blessed Holy Week and Pascha!

Father John

From Father Seraphim

We learn from *Genesis* and from the writings of the Holy Fathers that man holds a unique position in creation. St. Gregory the Theologian said in his *Oration on Pascha* that, “Man holds the space in the middle, between the heavenly and the earthly.” Mankind is tasked with mediating the relationship between both worlds. We, being in the image and likeness of God, bring the spiritual world down into contact with the earthly things through our invisible soul, and in our doxology raise the earthly to the Divine through our physical bodies. In *Genesis* we see man acting like God: Just as God speaks and creates all things, man speaks and names the animals, and God wonderfully abides by whatever man chooses to call the animals. This is *synergia* (Greek for “working together”) with God, as we were harmoniously designed to live and reign with Him. But man cannot name himself until woman is created – and in seeing her, Adam recognizes who he himself is. (*Genesis* 2:23) He names her woman and then names himself man and both are set to guard and protect the garden; sadly, by the third chapter, the Cherubim with the flaming sword is protecting it from us.

The details of the moment of the fall are fertile with meaning and can offer us theological fruit to sustain us through Great Lent. First, let us consider just what the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was. So often we focus on the “evil” because of the consequences that happen after partaking of the tree’s fruit. But what about the “knowledge of good?” Furthermore, we must remember that when the tree was created, it was part of the natural creation that God called “good” which means it was not a dark forbidden part of creation, nor was it a mistake to be avoided, though man was commanded not to eat of it initially by God.

There is a great paradox here. We spoke of earlier of the glory of man, and his position in creation: Truly it does seem that we were meant to “be like God.” Thus, the serpent’s words offering god-likeness to our first parents are truly confusing! When Adam and Eve partake of the fruit, would not their knowledge of God be heightened afterwards, since He is the source of all that is good? It may surprise us that they precisely became aware of this supreme goodness of God. Although the text reveals only their newfound knowledge of evil, their consciousness of transgression, and the consequent shame – at the same exact moment they become radically exposed to the good. This was God’s own Goodness and Love, which ultimately revealed to them the deep truth so intensely that sin leads not to joy, but rather to shame and fear. *(Continued on Page 10)*

From Father Seraphim (Continued from Page 9)

Another fascinating element in the text is that when Eve repeats to the serpent God's command to not eat from the tree, she adds the words, ***"Nor shall you touch it."*** (*Genesis 3:3*) Why did she add on to God's original command? Did Adam add this clause when he told her of the commandment to protect her? Or had she perhaps at that moment already taken a step toward eating the fruit and touched it, and now was spiraling on the way to the sin with the momentum building. We have all experienced this. We falsely think to ourselves, *"Well I've gone this far, I cannot go back now: I must partake in this evil deed."* A most difficult thing to acquire is the self-knowledge and the inner awareness that we are on our way toward a serious fall, and to back out and away from the trigger, temptation, thought or desire that is calling and tantalizing our soul.

We can contemplate the crushing scene of Adam and Eve hearing their Creator walking in the garden in the evening breeze calling out, ***"Where are you?"*** (*Genesis 3:9*) – and their reaction is to hide. Does the omniscient God truly not know where they are? Of course not! He is offering them an opportunity to repent, to admit (confess) what they have done and to be healed. We know what follows: The original blame game, a rupture of relationship between God and man and simultaneously between humans: ***"That woman You gave me!"*** (*Genesis 3:12*) With Eve's words the downward spiral continues with a further breach of the relationship between man and creation, ***"The serpent tempted me!"*** (*Genesis 3:13*) Both Adam and Eve knew that the consequence for eating from the tree was death, and this fear of death causes them to shy away from confessing their wrong doings and taking ownership for their own actions as they seek rather to save their own skin. The state that Adam and Eve find themselves in is terrible. Shame is unbearable as we all know; it is hell. God in His infinite mercy, not wanting them to endure this for eternity, casts them out of Paradise before they eat of the tree of life eternal and made this dismal state permanent.



This is where we find ourselves, outside of Paradise, in the year 2022 during the period of Great Lent. The Church gives to us three gifts: Three Old Testament books to read through and contemplate in this Holy Fast that correspond to the three categories of the sacred writings: Genesis (The Law), Proverbs (The Wisdom Literature) and Isaiah (The Prophets). As we pick up Genesis and begin to read it and to contemplate during this time we are reminded of our common human story. Like reading a family history, or love letters from the past, in reading and thinking about Genesis we can be moved to action. The more we become aware of the good, through prayer, keeping the fast, reading, attending Church services, and kindness, we simultaneously become deeply aware of all the evil within us. We should not run from this and hide in ignorance since we see what the result of that kind of action was and is. God is walking now, through the garden of our consciousness, through the minds and hearts of each one of us. He is calling out, ***"Where are you?"*** He has been hearing our prayers and our praise, He is aware of our sins, and desperately desires our confession, free of the blame of any others for our shortcomings and rebellion against His life-giving Commandments, so that He can heal us. Though we have touched sin and even partaken in it, it is not too late to regain Paradise!

As we approach Holy Week, may we all repent and receive healing and salvation through the One Whose Hands were pierced for the hands we stretch out toward sin . . . Whose Face received spitting while we turned our face from the light of the countenance of God to the darkness of dialogue with the devil . . . Whose Feet were pierced for our feet which run and hide from His Presence, and Whose whole Body suffered shame in being hung naked upon the Cross to relieve our terrible shame of nakedness, enslavement to the passions and the sting of death itself.

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With Love in Christ,

Father Seraphim



Orthodox Bookstore

Greetings from the Bookstore!

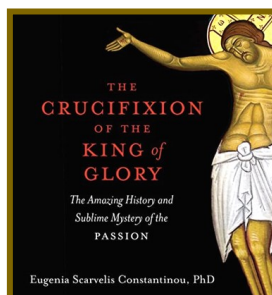
This month, and in time for Holy Week, we are featuring a new book selection just released from Ancient Faith Publishing by Dr. Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou called *The Crucifixion of the King of Glory*.

From the publisher's summary:

"The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ are central events in our salvation. Yet few Christians have a good grasp of the first-century historical and religious context in which the Crucifixion took place, nor of its true significance for the people of that time – and hence for our time as well. Biblical scholar Dr. Jeannie Constantinou puts modern readers in the center of the events of Christ's Passion, bringing the best of modern scholarship to bear while keeping her interpretation faithful in every particular to the Orthodox Tradition."

Visit the Bookstore for your copy. We also have many Lenten books in stock as well as new icons. Come and see!

With Love in Christ, Paraskevi Santamaria, Bookstore Director



With Gratitude to God for You . . .



Dearest Members of the Parish Council, Ladies Philoptochos and Community of St. John the Baptist,

Presvytera Maria and I offer our heartfelt thanksgiving to Christ our God for each and every one of you who contributed to making the 35th Anniversary of my Ordination to the Holy Priesthood an amazingly joyful and beautiful celebration.

We thank God for the sacred privilege of ministering to His Holy Church, and moreover for the true blessing it is to shepherd the flock of St. John the Baptist for nearly 20 years. I was blessed to receive the laying on of hands by Metropolitan Anthony, of blessed memory, and since 2005 to serve under our beloved hierarch and my friend, Metropolitan Gerasimos, and further, to continue building upon the ministry of our spiritual father, Metropolitan Ilia. It has been an added blessing mentoring, serving with and watching the growth of Father Matthew Swehla and Father Seraphim Ramos; and moreover, serving at the Holy Altar with Father Constantine Raptis, of blessed memory, and Father Paul Eyler. All of you in this beloved parish are indeed the "Amen" to our service in the Lord's Vineyard: May we continue serving and growing in Him together for many more years with love, gratitude, humility, and joy!

With Deepest Agape in Christ Our God, Father John Hondros

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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

Rev. Father John Hondros
fjohn@vegaskgreekorthodox.com

Rev. Father Seraphim Ramos
frseraphim@vegaskgreekorthodox.com

Karen Rawlinson
Administrative Assistant

Michelle Eugenio
Bookkeeper

Mara Braun
Catering & Events

Constantin Petriuc
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:

Anne Pantelas & Maha Habiba

Orthodox Family Fellowship:
Imtisal Amy Khuri & April Rivera

Young Adults:
Father Seraphim

Greek Folk Dance: Sia Dalacas

Greek School: Paula Kelesis

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

Kali Pareia: Demetrios 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



CHURCH 365

“Let Us Exalt His Name Together!” (Psalm 34:3)

CONNECTING 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

CHURCH 365

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 2022 of \$ _____.

Signed: _____

Orthodox Christian: Yes No

Signed: _____

Orthodox Christian: Yes No

Others sharing in the gift (children): _____

STEWARDSHIP AND OTHER GIVING OPTIONS

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

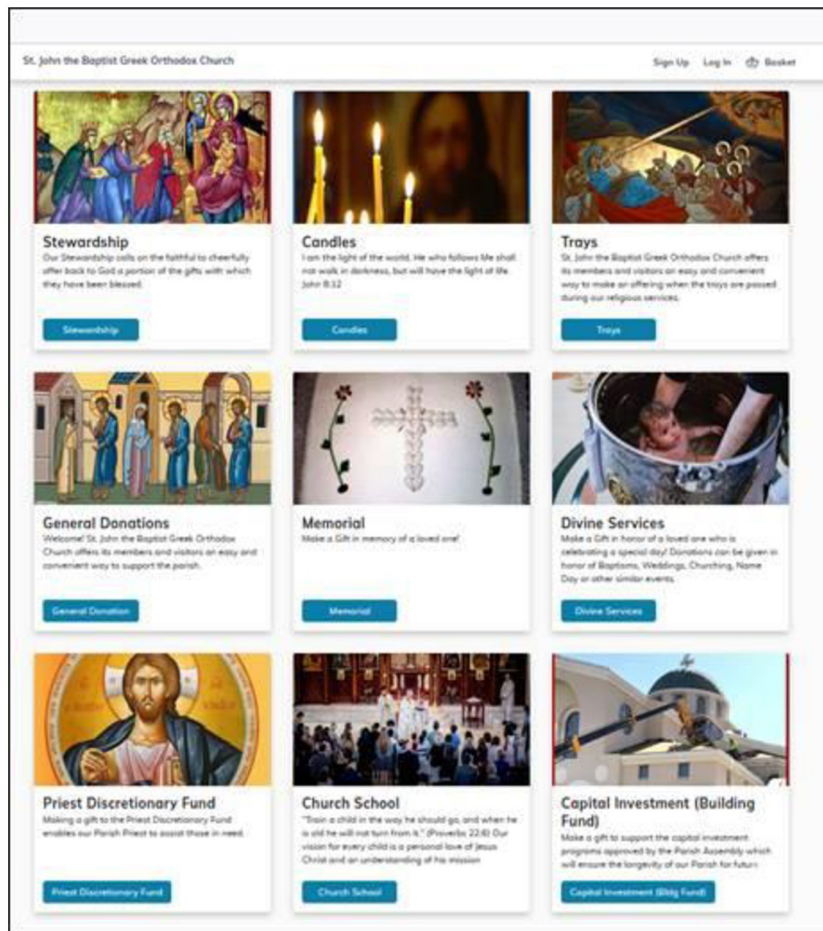
On behalf of Fr. John, Fr. Seraphim and the Parish Council, we would like to thank you for your ongoing support to our Parish.

For 2022 the Parish is launching a new way for our faithful members to offer their Stewardship and other donations. This new way is via VANCO for making our electronic offerings, be it Stewardship, trays, candles and so on. Our goal is to centralize where our members go for their generous support to St. John and to protect your personal credit card or banking information.

In past years the means of making your blessed offerings has been via PayPal, giving the Parish your credit card or banking information to set up your automatic payments, by personal check or cash. However, as of December 31, 2021 PayPal will no longer be available and we will not be requesting your personal credit card or banking information to set up your individual donations. Of course, written personal checks and cash will still be an option.

We pray for your continued support and respectfully request you set up your own account in VANCO for your generous financial support to St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church. You can click on this link (<https://secure.myvanco.com/L-YZYE/home>) to go to our Parish VANCO account to set up your personal account.

Should you need any assistance in setting up your account in VANCO, please contact John Karas via email (jkaras@vegasgreekorthodox.com) and he will be more than happy to assist you. Below you can see what our Parish VANCO website looks like.



Ministry News

Church School



Kali Anastasi! We are in the full swing of Lent. I hope your children are enjoying all of the Lenten lessons from the classroom and the *Orthodox Journeys* curriculum. Please let me know if you would like the lessons emailed to you: They have some wonderful information for many age groups.

Please join us for *Palm Tying following the Divine Liturgy on Saturday of Lazaros, April 16*. We will have Lenten refreshments for all our children and adults who join us for this event. His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos will be joining us for Palm Sunday weekend – and this is a wonderful opportunity for our youth to greet and meet His Eminence. *We will have Family Worship (no classes) on Palm Sunday, April 17 and Holy Pascha, April 24*. We invite all our Church School youth to join us for the annual *Children's Procession at the Holy Friday Service at 3:00 pm*.

We will be having our *Agape Picnic on Holy Pascha*, including our annual *Egg Hunt at 2:00 pm*. Again this year we are asking for donations: We can use all kinds of candy except for chocolate, as it melts. Please bring your filled eggs during the week to Karen, to my classroom on Sundays or to the Parish Council Office during weeknight services – we will be collecting through Holy Thursday. If you have no time to fill the plastic eggs, that is okay – we will take your donations in any way they arrive.

Finally, please mark your calendar for *Church School Commencement on Sunday, May 22*. Let me know of any high school seniors in our parish who are graduating, so we can properly acknowledge them. Please let me know if you have any questions.

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

Orthodox Family Fellowship (OFF)

Dear Parents and Elementary School Youth,

Blessed conclusion to our Lenten Journey and Holy Week! This month we have many activities for you to enjoy and be uplifted by. First, we will participate in the all-youth *Palm Tying on Lazaros Saturday, April 16*, following the Orthros and Divine Liturgy. *Then on Great and Holy Friday, April 22 at 3:00 pm* – the day on which our Lord Jesus Christ was nailed to the Precious Cross for our salvation – we will have the Children's Procession following the Removal of the Lord's Body from the Cross. As is customary, there will be a discussion focusing on the meaning of this Holy Day.

On *Holy Pascha Sunday, April 24* after the Agape Vespers (at noon), and during the Agape Picnic, there will be a celebratory Egg Hunt for the young kids.

Finally, you are also invited to participate in the *All-Youth After Pascha Party on Tuesday, April 26 at 5:00 pm in Panos Hall*. This will be a potluck in the light and joy of our Lord's Resurrection. We hope you take advantage of the many opportunities this month for fellowship, faith, and friendship!

In Christ, April Rivera, OFF Advisor



GOYA - Our Teen Ministry

Blessed second half of the Holy Season of Lent! Please remember to try and attend some of the beautiful, unique, and powerful Lenten Services offered during the week and especially the once-a-year services of Great and Holy Week!

This April we will have the opportunity to have *GOYA Night on Sunday, April 10 in Panos Hall*. We will have our customary Lenten meal with fellowship, prayer, games, and discussion. If you would like to help bring a fast-friendly dish to share, please let us know!

A second activity is open and available to us on the morning of *Lazaros Saturday, April 16* – after the Orthros and Divine Liturgy, we will share Lenten refreshments and participate in the enjoyable labor and fellowship of Palm Tying and decorating the Church! Please come help us, as many hands are needed and make the work go quickly! Please also make the time and effort to greet and meet His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos during Palm Sunday weekend!

A further wonderful opportunity for service to the Community of our Parish is available on *Holy Pascha, April 24 at the Agape Picnic*. We need some members of our GOYA to step up and take a shift serving food: If you are interested in this selfless act of service, please contact the Church Office. Karen will connect you with one of our picnic chairs, Stephanie Demoleas, Demetrious Asim, or Steve Tzelalis.

Finally, we will be having a post-Pascha celebration on *Bright Tuesday, April 26 at 5:00 pm in Panos Hall*. This will be a wonderful potluck and celebration in the Lord's Resurrection for our GOYA. We hope to see you there!

Love in Christ, Father Seraphim



*Memories from
OFF and GOYA
Lenten Retreats*



Myrrh Bearers

We are looking for girls 6th through 12th grades to participate in Holy Week services as Myrrh Bearers. They will participate in the First Bridegroom Service on Palm Sunday Evening, Holy Thursday, Holy Friday and Holy Saturday Resurrection Services. There will be a mandatory meeting on *Sunday, April 10, following Divine Liturgy in the Church*. We will be going over the details, including what to wear and the times. Please reach out to me for more information at (702) 521-6516 or vivaleenie@cox.net.

In Christ, Eileen Koutsulis

Altar Servers

There is a mandatory Acolyte practice on *Sunday, April 10, following the Divine Liturgy in the Church*. All Altar Servers must attend this practice in preparation for the Hierarchical Palm Sunday Divine Liturgy and Holy Week Services.

Yours in Christ, Father John and Father Seraphim

Young Adults

Christ is in our midst! Blessed end of the Lenten Journey and Holy Week, as we progress toward the Holy Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Please make sure to take the time out of your schedules to come to some of the beautiful and powerful Lenten Services – and especially for Holy Week and Pascha, as this is the very heart of our Faith and Life.

This month we will have a *Post-Pascha Potluck Party on Wednesday, April 27 at 5:30 pm at Sam, John and Eileen Koutsulis' Home*. Please RSVP for directions and with what you will bring: Side dish, drinks, dessert, or salad. This will help us know how much food to prepare.

We hope to see you in Church and at our fellowship gathering! In Christ, Father Seraphim

Mr. & Mrs.

For April, we will not formally gather, but we will join in the beautiful Services for the remainder of Lent and Holy Week – and then celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ at our *Agape Picnic on Holy Pascha, Sunday, April 24*.

For May, we will have a BBQ at Mark and Alyssa Brown's Home – the date is to be determined.

We look forward to seeing you in Church!

Blessed Resurrection! Father John and Father Seraphim and their Presvyteres

Kali Pareia - For the 40-Plus Crowd

We had a very enjoyable night out with the parish at Red Rock Theater to watch *Man of God*.

Please join us *on Saturday, April 9 at 1:00 pm* at my home for a Lenten Potluck – and bring a fast-friendly dish to share. At 2:00 pm Father Seraphim will offer a slide presentation on St. John of San Francisco. Please RSVP with me and I will share my address.

Kalo Pascha! Demetrious Asim (702) 210-4056



You are encouraged to join us for the beautiful Lenten and Holy Week Services. If you have been sick for the last 48 hours, please do not come to Church. If you are unable to come to Church, your Priests are here to light a candle for you and your loved ones. Please call Karen with your request.

Notes from the Choir Loft



In preparation for Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Pascha, we will have the following rehearsals:

Sunday, April 10 after Liturgy.

Holy Monday, April 18 at 5:45 pm.

Holy Tuesday, April 19 at 5:45 pm.

Holy Wednesday, April 20 at 5:45 pm.

Please mark your calendars and join us! If you would like to sing with the Choir, please join us up in the Choir Loft! Athena Mertes, Director

Forerunners - Our Seniors Fellowship

The St. Patrick's Day Luncheon was enjoyable, and we had door and raffle prizes. Members were treated to a lunch of fasolada (bean soup), homemade bread, dolmathes, hummus and pita, and dessert – all prepared by Marika Lamancusa, Steve Tzelalis and our excellent kitchen staff.

We want to wish our very own Sam Koutsulis a happy 92nd Birthday! Chronia Polla!

Please join us for our next Luncheon *on Monday, April 11 at 11:30 am.* Please pay your annual membership at this time.

As always, our prayers and good wishes are extended to all our Seniors in our parish who are recuperating in hospitals, other facilities or at home. Have a Blessed Lenten Season, Holy Week and Pascha!

Love in Christ, Faye Brown for the Forerunners

Kokkos Scholarships

The Scholarship Committee for the Kokkos Scholarship Fund is pleased to announce that applications are available at the Church Office. If you wish to receive your application via email, please contact Karen at karen@vegasgreekorthodox.com. The applications must be returned *on or before Sunday, May 15*. Late and/or incomplete applications will not be considered.

The eligibility requirements were established by Fofa Kokkos in her Last Will and Testament. The Scholarship Committee for the Kokkos Scholarship Fund administers this program under the guidance of Father John Hondros. The Kokkos Will stipulates that two high school graduates of Greek descent within the St. John Community be selected, who are enrolled for higher education to a college or university. The scholarship amounts this year are \$1,500. The students must have an outstanding scholastic record and be in financial need. Also, Parish involvement by the students at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church was important to Fofa Kokkos; therefore, this is also a factor in evaluating the applicants.

Please contact the Church Office for more information at (702) 221-8245.

John Matsis and the Kokkos Scholarship Committee



Do You Have an AMAZON Account?
Do you know your purchases on AMAZON
can financially benefit our Parish?

If you do, you can help our Parish by logging into your account by going to: smile.amazon.com.

Sign in with the same account information you use for Amazon.com.

Select your charity: St. John Greek Orthodox Church. Location: Las Vegas, NV.

Start shopping! Remember to checkout at smile.amazon.com to generate donations for our parish.

THERE IS NO ADDITIONAL COST TO YOU.

**2022
Stewardship
Report
(as of 3/29/22)**

Stewardship Gifts Pledged: \$430,060 (\$409,819 in 2021)
 Stewardship Gifts Received: \$210,915 (\$172,078 in 2021)
 Unfulfilled Pledge Balance: \$219,145 (\$237,741 in 2021)
 Stewardship Families Pledged: 314 (291 in 2021)
 2022 Budgeted Goal: \$500,000 . . . Keep the Pledges Coming!

*"Let Us
Exalt
His Name
Together!"
(Psalm 34:3)*

<u>Average Pledge</u>	<u>No. of Families</u>	<u>Amount Pledged</u>
\$1 ~ \$500	132	\$ 34,324
\$501 ~ \$1,000	69	\$ 53,431
\$1,001 ~ \$2,500	77	\$ 121,915
\$2,501 ~ \$5,000	21	\$ 78,290
\$5,001 & Above	<u>15</u>	<u>\$ 142,100</u>
Total Families	314	\$430,060

Church Account Summaries - March 2022

Nevada State Bank Accounts	January	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	February	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
General Operating Account (GOA)	\$111,977.28	\$125,486.42	\$17,399.32	\$27,941.59	\$100,259.13	\$126,662.30	
Community and Education (C&E)	\$44,545.50	\$5,800.00				\$50,345.50	
Greek Food Festival (GFF)	\$108,439.74	\$113.00			\$15,217.77	\$93,334.97	
Designated, Restricted & Other (DR&O)	\$169,684.08	\$6,618.62	\$50,000.00	\$758.03	\$1,950.41	\$223,594.26	
Folk Dance Group	\$21,703.00	\$1,000.00		\$2,887.80	\$96.00	\$19,719.20	
Hellenic Historical Society	\$3,064.94		\$5,000.00			\$8,064.94	
Designated Funds	January	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	February	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Bookstore	\$21,914.23	\$5,304.00		\$758.03	\$1,400.41	\$25,059.79	
Ornaments	\$1,169.41					\$1,169.41	
Restricted Funds	January	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	February	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
ICON	\$2,899.27	\$300.00				\$3,199.27	
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	\$44,558.50	\$14.62	\$50,000.00			\$94,573.12	
Youth Choir	\$2,989.18					\$2,989.18	
Church School	\$6,306.37					\$6,306.37	
Three Priests	\$57,094.51				\$550.00	\$56,544.51	
Roof Appeal	\$11,183.22					\$11,183.22	
Altar Servers	\$440.00					\$440.00	
GOYA	\$142.36					\$142.36	
Landscaping	\$0.00	\$1,000.00				\$1,000.00	For re-seeding field
Restricted Donation	\$10,000.00					\$10,000.00	Undesignated Donation
Designated, Restricted, and Other Total	\$169,684.08	\$6,618.62	\$50,000.00	\$758.03	\$1,950.41	\$223,594.26	
Other Funds	January	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	February	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Kokkos Scholarship Fund	\$76,944.03					\$76,944.03	As of 12/31/21
Commonwealth Investments	\$134,704.51			\$3,380.26		\$131,324.25	Change in Investment

February 2022 Candles **\$5,247.60**
February 2022 Trays **\$3,328.00**
Total February 2022 Candles & Trays **\$8,575.60**



APRIL 2022 ~ IN THE YEAR OF THE LORD

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
					1 6:30 pm 4th Salutations to the Theotokos	2
3 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	4 6:00 pm Great Compline 7:00 pm Adult Basketball	5 6:00 pm Parish Council Meeting in Library		7	8 6:30 pm Akathist Hymn to the Theotokos	9 9:00 am Philoptochos Baking 1:00 pm Kali Pareia Lenten Potluck at Demetri Asim's Home
10 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy <i>Adult Choir Practice</i> <i>Myrrh Bearer and Acolyte Practice follows Liturgy</i> 5:00 pm GOYA Night	11 11:30 am Forerunners Luncheon in Kokkos Hall 6:00 pm Great Compline 7:00 pm Adult Basketball	12	13 6:00 pm Presanctified Liturgy	14	15	16 Saturday of Lazarus 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy <i>Palm Tying Follows</i> 6:00 pm Great Vespers of Palm Sunday with Metropolitan Gerasimos
17 Palm Sunday 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Hierarchical Divine Liturgy with Metropolitan Gerasimos <i>Palm Sunday Luncheon</i> 7:00 pm 1st Bridegroom Service	18 Holy Monday 5:45 pm Adult Choir Practice 7:00 pm 2nd Bridegroom Service	19 Holy Tuesday 5:45 pm Adult Choir Practice 7:00 pm 3rd Bridegroom Service <i>Hymn of Kassiani</i>	20 Holy Wednesday 9:00 am Presanctified Liturgy 5:45 pm Adult Choir Practice 7:00 pm Holy Unction	21 Holy Thursday 9:00 am Vespers Liturgy of St. Basil 7:00 pm Holy Passion of Our Lord <i>Reading of 12 Gospels</i>	22 Holy Friday 10:00 am Royal Hours 3:00 pm Removal of Christ from the Cross <i>Children's Procession</i> 7:00 pm Lamentations	23 Holy Saturday 9:00 am Vespers Liturgy of St. Basil 11:00 pm Resurrection Vigil
24 Holy Pascha 12:00 am Resurrection Orthros and Divine Liturgy <i>Blessing of Red Eggs</i> 12:00 pm Agape Vespers and Agape Picnic	25 Holy Great Martyr George 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy	26 5:00 pm All-Youth Pascha Potluck in Panos Hall	27 5:30 pm Young Adults Potluck at John, Eileen and Sam Koutsulis' Home	28	29 The Theotokos ~ Life-Giving Spring 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy	30

The Desert Messenger

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

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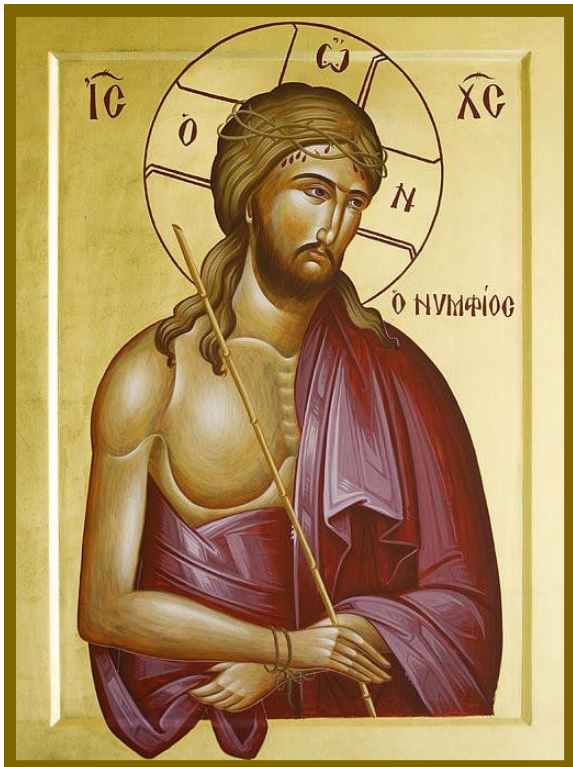
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THE DESERT MESSENGER

The Way of the Lord



Lenten 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.*