

The Desert



Messenger

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

Volume 21, Issue 11 St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Las Vegas, NV

December 2023

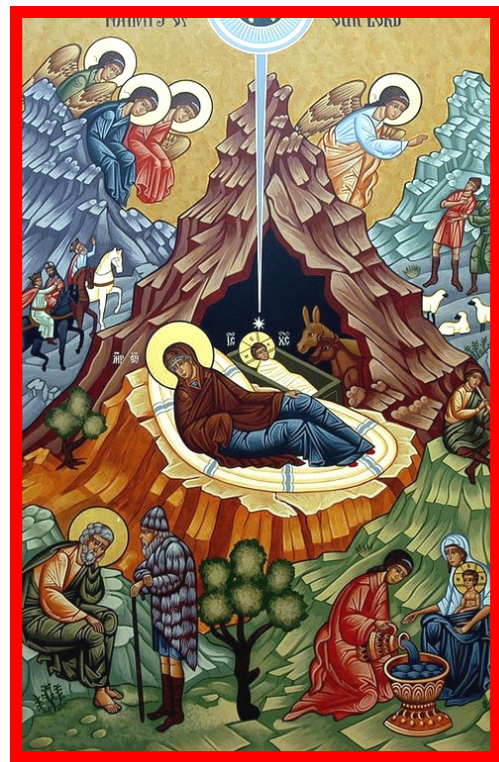
From
Father
John

Beloved in Christ:

During this Holy Season, our proper preparation for Christmas should include the opposite of what the world engages in: Prayer, fasting, confession, charity, kindness, seeking peace and unity, forgiveness and love. As we prepare spiritually to approach the cave where our pre-eternal Lord Jesus Christ is born in the flesh, let us pause and take a moment to reflect on whom God allowed to be present at this significant event in our salvation.

In the Gospel according to St. Matthew, we read that the Magi – or “wise men” – were led by a star to the place where Christ was born, so that they might worship Him. (*Matthew 2:1-2*) As our Orthodox hymn for the Nativity proclaims, “those who had been star-worshippers learned through a star to worship You.” The Magi traveled from the East, from a place far away from ancient Israel, signifying that even with Jesus’ Birth, God was calling the Gentiles to worship Him as Messiah. St. John Chrysostom explains that it was not an ordinary star that led the Magi, “as it appeared in mid-day, even brighter than the beams of the sun,” but rather “it was a power highly endowed with reason.” Just like the pillar of the cloud – a manifestation of the Presence of God – guided the ancient Jews in the desert, the star appeared when it was needful for the faithful Magi, who followed Him out of obedience and love, and yet remained hidden from the evil Herod who sought to destroy the Christ-child because he feared for his own throne. Similarly, the leaders of the temple who had taught and had access to all the prophecies were also, due to their lack of faith and love, unable to ascertain where the birth of the Messiah took place. Even today, the Holy Spirit, like the star, leads people of all walks to Christ and His Church, while nominal Christians and anti-Christians remain spiritually blind.

In St. Luke’s Gospel account, the shepherds – who represent the Jewish poor – were the first to worship the Christ-child. The angelic revelation occurred as the shepherds were “*out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.*” (*Luke 2:8-9*) As with the Apostles, the shepherds were humble men of God, servants with integrity, who unlike the temple leaders did not rely on others for their livelihood but toiled and labored night and day to put food on their table. The glory of the heavens and the announcement of the Lord’s Birth were not revealed to people in high positions in the religious circles, but rather to the meek and lowly – similar to today’s blue-collar workers – who tended to their flock at night while the elite slept in the comfort of their homes. After receiving the message from the angel, the shepherds “*went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.*” (*Luke 2:16*) Because of their pure faith and love, the shepherds were the first to worship the Good Shepherd: How much more should we, who are the rational flock of Christ – as members of His Body – readily and humbly worship Him Who dwells in the manger of our hearts!



(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>***

Sunday, December 3/*Fourteenth Sunday of Luke/
Holy Prophet Zephaniah/Holy Father John the
Hesychast, Bishop of Colonia/Holy Martyrs
Agapios and Seleucios/Holy Hiermartyr Theodore,
Archbishop of Alexandria/New Martyr
Angelis/Holy Hiermartyr Karpos*
Orthros: First Tone
Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): Luke 24:1-12
Epistle: Ephesians 5:8-19
Gospel: Luke 18:35-43
Memorial: Maria Bogatireva (40 days); Ana Limpede
Fellowship: Stewardship All-Stars Luncheon
Parish Council Election follows Liturgy

Wednesday, December 6/*Holy Father Nicholas
the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra/New
Martyr Nicholas of Asia Minor*
8:00 am Orthros
9:00 am Divine Liturgy
Epistle: Hebrews 13:17-21
Gospel: Luke 6:17-23

Sunday, December 10/*Tenth Sunday of Luke/
Holy Martyrs Minas, Hermogenes, and Eugephos
of Alexandria/St. Thomas of
Bithynia*
Orthros: Second Tone
Resurrection Gospel (Orthros):
Luke 24:13-35
Epistle: Ephesians 6:10-17
Gospel: Luke 13:10-17
Fellowship: Friends of the Church

Tuesday, December 12/*Holy Father
Spyridon the Wonderworker,
Bishop of Trimythous*
8:00 am Orthros
9:00 am Divine Liturgy
Epistle: Ephesians 5:8-19
Gospel: John 10:9-16

Christ is Born: Glorify Him!



Sunday, December 17/*Eleventh Sunday of Luke/
Holy Forefathers of Christ/Holy Prophet Daniel
and the Three Holy Youths, Ananias, Azarias, and
Misail/Holy Father Dionysios the Wonderworker
of Zakynthos and Bishop of Aegina*
Orthros: Third Tone
Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): Luke 24:36-53
Epistle: Colossians 3:4-11
Gospel: Luke 14:16-24
Memorials: Irina Pachomova (40 days); Joanne
Monroe (6 months); Anastasia Kozonas (1 year)
Fellowship: Greek Folk Dance "Fasolada"

Sunday, December 24/*Sunday Before and Eve of
the Nativity of Christ/Ancestors of Christ/
Prophets and Prophetesses, especially Prophet
Daniel and the Three Youths/Holy Martyr Evgenia*
Orthros: Fourth Tone
Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): John 20:1-10
Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom
Epistle: Hebrews 11:9-10, 32-40
Gospel: Matthew 1:1-25
Fellowship: Young Adults

Sunday Evening, December 24
5:00 pm *Great Vespers of the Holy Nativity*

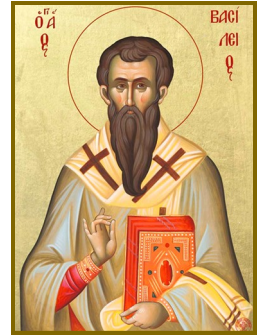
Monday, December 25/*The Nativity in the Flesh
of Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ*
9:00 am Orthros
10:00 am *Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great*
Epistle: Galatians 4:4-7
Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Wednesday, December 27/*Holy First-Martyr and
Archdeacon Stephen/Holy Father and Confessor
Theodore, brother of St. Thophanes the Poet/
Holy Father Theodore, Patriarch of
Constantinople*
8:00 am Orthros
9:00 am *Divine Liturgy*
Epistle: Acts 6:8-15; 7:1-5, 47-60
Gospel: Matthew 21:33-42

WORSHIP SCHEDULE *(Continued from Page 2)*

Sunday, December 31/ *Sunday After the Nativity/ Holy and Righteous Joseph the Betrothed/David the King/James (Iakovos), the Brother of the Lord/ Leave-Taking of the Nativity/Holy Mother Melania of Rome/Holy Father Zoticos the Presbyter and Patron of Orphans*
 Orthros: First Plagal Tone
 Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): John 20:11-18
 Epistle: 2 Timothy 4:5-8
 Gospel: Mark 1:1-8
 Fellowship: The Merritt Family

Monday, January 1, 2024/ *Circumcision in the Flesh of Our Lord Jesus Christ/Holy Father Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, and his mother, St. Emmelia*
 9:00 am Orthros
 10:00 am Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great
 Epistle: Colossians 2:8-12
 Gospel: Luke 2:21-20, 40-52



Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Services



Sunday, December 24

Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ

8:45 am Orthros

10:00 am Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

5:00 pm Great Vespers

Monday, December 25

Nativity of Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ

9:00 am Orthros

10:00 am Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great

As Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday, we will have Liturgy on Sunday morning and Great Vespers on Sunday evening (without Holy Communion). Please be prepared to receive Holy Communion at both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Liturgies. Join us as we worship the New-Born King!

From Father John *(Continued from Page 1)*

As the Lord continues revealing the glory of His love to people of all races, ethnicities, social classes and, yes, spiritual backgrounds, let us not resist – rather, we must willingly and warmly embrace all who journey toward the fullness of Christ in His Holy Orthodox Church. On the Feast of our Lord’s Nativity let us join the Magi, shepherds and angels in proclaiming: *“Glory in the highest to Him Who in the cave this day is born of the Virgin and Theotokos, in Bethlehem of Judah.”* (First Kathisma, Orthros of the Nativity)

With Love in Christ,

Father John



**Parish
Council
Report**

Dear Father John, Father Florin, Deacon John, Ministries and Parishioners,
Chronia Polla! I want to thank all that were able to attend the Parish Assembly meeting. I believe we are headed in the right direction. Your strong support of our Church and its ministries is crucial in accomplishing the tasks at hand. We will involve all of our parishioners and schedule open discussion meetings before we implement future projects and programs. For example, we invite all suggestions and information pertaining to restructuring and planning a possible C&E (Catering and Events) Committee. Get involved! We encourage your thoughts and ideas and offer to be a part of these committees.

December is a month of prayer, fasting and repentance for us Orthodox Christians. Beginning on November 15 and concluding on December 24, the Nativity Fast gives individuals the opportunity to prepare for the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord and Savior in the Flesh on December 25. As Christians, our prayers, thoughts and offerings only strengthen our ability to grow as the family that is deserving of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church. I am certain that those who attended the Parish Assembly, the word "Family" was mentioned several times. My prayer is to nurture this expression of unity. It will only make us stronger in the Faith.

We have some important events planned and we pray everyone comes together to participate. We will be honoring three Parish Members at the Annual Stewardship All-Stars Luncheon *on Sunday, December 3*, immediately following Divine Liturgy. Congratulations are in order to Peter Papas, Demetrios Philippou and Cleo Wilson. May God grant them the strength and health to continue their devotion to our Church. The Luncheon will offer a fast-friendly meal for \$10 per person. Again, if able, please plan to attend.

Also vitally important *on Sunday, December 3*, we have Parish Council Elections. For those unable to be present, Absentee Ballots will be available at our Church Office through *Friday, December 1 at 12:00 noon*. Remember, you must be a Steward for 2023 to vote. God's speed to those who have acknowledged and have accepted nomination to run.

On behalf of our present Parish Council, I personally want to thank you for the honor to have served over the past two years. I ask forgiveness for those that I may have offended and pray that all of you look forward to the Birth of our Lord and Savior.

Yours Always in Christ, with Much Love,
John Fotopoulos, Parish Council President



*Baptized into Christ:
Na Mas Zisoun*

Sophia, daughter of Richard and Angela Acovino,
on November 4, 2023.
Godparent: Paraskevi Baldwin.

Maria (Eva), daughter of Dorjan Mersuli and Melina Vlahos,
on November 11, 2023. Godparents: Maria Delasoudas and Pelagia Ledo.

Alexandria (Alessandra), daughter of John Spiropoulos and Jessica Huete,
on November 17, 2023. Godparent: Thomas Amarantos.

Athanasios (Bentley), son of Mark and Alyssa Brown, on November 18, 2023.
Godparents: Michael and Antonia Ristagno.



An example of the Faith and an icon of gentleness, the rule of your life has shown you forth to your flock as a master of temperance. You obtained through being humble, gifts from on high, and riches through poverty. Nicholas, our father and hierarch, intercede with Christ our God that He may save our souls.

Philoptochos News

“Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth peace, good will toward men.” (Luke 2:14)

Peace on Earth: This is what we all are praying for these days. How blessed we are to be surrounded by our family and friends at this most Holy Time when so many around the world are being separated.

I know that many of you in our wonderful Church family have been so amazing in supporting all the Philoptochos projects and events over the last month. THANK YOU very much.

You have baked, packed, and bought sweets. You have sent your greetings to your fellow parishioners and have sent wreaths and garlands to family and friends here and far away.

There are so many fabulous Philoptochos Members who stepped up to chair these events and to lend a hand: From the Departed Members Memorial and the Ss. Cosmas and Damianos Fellowship, the Autumn Bake Sale, to the Baking Days and Packing Days for the Holiday Pastry Sale – and finally, with the the Community Christmas Card and the Wreath Sale. You are all the keys to the success of these projects and truly give meaning to the mission statement of the Ladies Philoptochos Society. The members of the Philoptochos will be taking a well-deserved break for the rest of December. We will be back in January with new plans and projects.

Wishing a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to All.

Your Sister in Christ, Bernadette Anthony, Philoptochos President





Parish Council Elections 2024-25 Term

Sunday, December 3 - Following Liturgy

Panos Hall Foyer

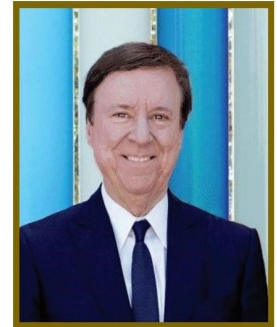
Six Available Positions - Our Nominees:



Richard Acovino



Nicholas Barbarino



George Bochanis



Alexia Conger



Telly Eliades



Eleni Filios



John Fotopoulos



Alex Mavros



Elias Rivera



Steve Tzelalis

*All 2023 Parish Stewards are Eligible to Vote!
For current Stewards unable to be present on Election Day,
please call Karen for an Absentee Ballot. Absentee Ballots must be returned
to the Church Office by Friday, December 1, 2023 at 12:00 pm.*

**Father John, the Parish Council and the
Stewardship and Outreach Committee
Invite You to Join Us for the Annual
Stewardship**



Luncheon

**Honoring Peter Papas,
Demetrios Philippou,
and Cleopatra "Cleo" Wilson
Sunday, December 3
Following Divine Liturgy
Panos Hall**

**Join us as we pay tribute to three MVPs . . .
Most Valuable Parishioners!
\$10 Fast Friendly Meal**



**The Community of St. John The Baptist
Greek Orthodox Church**

2023 Annual Christmas Card

A wonderful way of expressing our Christmas Greetings and best wishes for the holidays to our family and friends this year by including our name on the St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Community Christmas Card.

Please complete this form and return with your check for \$25.00 made out to the Ladies Philoptochos Society, to the Church office by December 4, 2023

Name on the card (example – Jones Family, or Gus Jones)

To purchase please complete, the following:

Name: _____

Day time or Cell phone number: _____

Check enclosed and number on the check: \$ _____

Credit card payments please contact Karen at the church office @ 702-221-8245

Offered by The Ladies Philoptochos Society.



THE LADIES
PHILOPTOCHOS
SOCIETY
THANKSGIVING &
CHRISTMAS
FUNDRAISER



Lynch Creek Farm handcrafts traditional and decorated Christmas wreaths, fresh centerpieces, and other beautiful holiday gifts of exceptional quality.



*Fresh
Garland*

STARTING AT
\$59.95



*Center
Pieces*

STARTING AT
\$49.95



*Fresh
Wreaths*

STARTING AT
\$49.95

Your choice will make great client and family gifts. You can ship your gifts directly to your recipients on the date you select, as early as November 1.

Scan this QR code with your phone to order



Philoptochos will receive 15% of all orders.

Stewardship and Community Outreach

We have entered the Nativity Season and it is a time of reflection, joy, and anticipation. It is also a time to contemplate the concept of Christian Stewardship, a principle deeply rooted in Scripture and the teachings of the Church Fathers. Stewardship, in essence, is the recognition that everything we have is a gift from God, and we are merely caretakers of these gifts. In the Book of Genesis, God puts Adam in Eden *“to tend and keep it.” (Genesis 2:15)* This Divine mandate sets the foundation for Christian Stewardship.

The Nativity Season provides a unique opportunity to exercise our Stewardship at a higher level. The gift of Christ to the world exemplifies God’s ultimate act of generosity. As recipients of this gift, we are called to respond in kind, not out of obligation, but out of love and gratitude. St. John Chrysostom emphasized the importance of Stewardship, writing “The rich exist for the sake of the poor. The poor exist for the salvation of the rich,” which underscores the idea that our resources are not solely for our benefit but are meant to be shared with others.

Our Stewardship can take many forms: It could be donating to a charity, volunteering time to help those in need, or simply being more mindful of our consumption. These acts of generosity echo the love and selflessness embodied by Christ’s birth. St. Paul wrote, *“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7)* This verse encapsulates the spirit of Christian Stewardship during the Nativity Season. There’s a reason there are so many “pat” sayings such as “the gift is in the giving” for God richly blesses us cheerful givers, and we need no further proof than the descriptor “jolly old St. Nick.”

December is a wonderful month in which to reflect on our Stewardship efforts during the past year; it is a time to celebrate God’s love manifested in the Birth of Christ; and it is also a time to perhaps ramp up our practice of Christian Stewardship, recognizing that we are caretakers of God’s gifts. And, as we give cheerfully and generously, we mirror the love and generosity of God Himself.

Reflecting back on 2023, we thank all the St. John the Baptist Stewards for their giving and humbly make a gentle request to ensure your end-of-year contributions are sent in so that we can make a start of “closing the books.”

Mike Beeler, for the Stewardship and Outreach Committee

CHURCH 360

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, if you have not yet done so, we respectfully request you take the time to fill out the questionnaire we have prepared. This will enable the Parish to better communicate with you. Click [HERE](#) to access the questionnaire. The information you provide will only be used by the Parish to better serve the members of our community.

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

5300 S. El Camino Road
Las Vegas, NV 89118

Rev. Father John Hondros
frjohn@vegasgreekorthodox.com

Rev. Father Florin Ristache
frflorin@vegasgreekorthodox.com

Rev. Deacon John Nixon
deaconjohn@vegasgreekorthodox.com

Karen Rawlinson
Administrative Assistant

Michelle Eugenio
Bookkeeper

Claudia Kasiotis
Housekeeping

Office Hours

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

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

Parish Council: John Fotopoulos

Philoptochos: Bernadette Anthony

Stewardship & Community Outreach:
John Karas

Building & Maintenance:
Eleni Filios

Choir: Athena Mertes

Chanters & Youth Choir:
Presvytera Maria Hondros

Church School: Eileen Koutsulis

Altar Servers: Father John

GOYA:

Fr. Florin Ristache & Maha Habiba

Orthodox Family Fellowship:
Fr. Florin Ristache & April Rivera

Young Adults: Fr. Florin Ristache

Greek Folk Dance: Sia Dalacas

Mr. & Mrs.:

Fr. John & Presv. Maria,
Fr. Florin & Presv. Alexandra

Kali Parea: Demetrious Asim

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

Building and Maintenance Committee

I hope that everyone had a great Thanksgiving Holiday. For those of you who were unable to attend the Parish Assembly meeting I wanted to provide you with an update on the new air conditioning units. The previous contractor to whom we had given the job, sold the company and we were having issues getting the units that had been ordered. When the date of delivery and install came and passed, I did not feel comfortable with the updates being given and asked for the deposit of \$47,000 to be reimbursed. Fortunately, all the monies were given back in full and once again the units were put out for bid. I want to apologize for the inconvenience, but the units are now once again on order and the new company is not requiring any deposits or payments until the units are in and completely installed, which should be soon.

This month eight toilets throughout Panos Hall needed repair (\$1,200) and ten trees that have died are being taken out (\$900). Also, you may notice some scaffolding inside the Church. We are in the process of repairing some of the walls from previous water damage. Please be careful and keep your children away from these temporary structures.

As the year comes to an end, I am very proud and grateful of all the work that has been accomplished through your generosity. Some of the major projects have included: The remaining roof replacement of our Community Center, repaving and striping of our parking lots, new bollard and wall post lighting, refurbishment of our two fountains, perimeter gate repairs and replacements and finally upgraded Wi-Fi system with additional cameras. Moving into the new year, we hope to be able to re-stucco and paint the Community Center and possibly replace the cork flooring in Panos and Kokkos Halls. These projects are at the top of the list. As I have encouraged throughout my monthly messages over the past two years, if you would like to be a part of the Building Committee, I would be most appreciative for your help.

I like to wish all of you and your families a very Merry Christmas and a New Year filled with health, happiness and many blessings. *Kales Yiortes.*

With Love, Eleni Filios, Building and Maintenance Chair

Orthodox Bookstore

Greetings from the Bookstore!

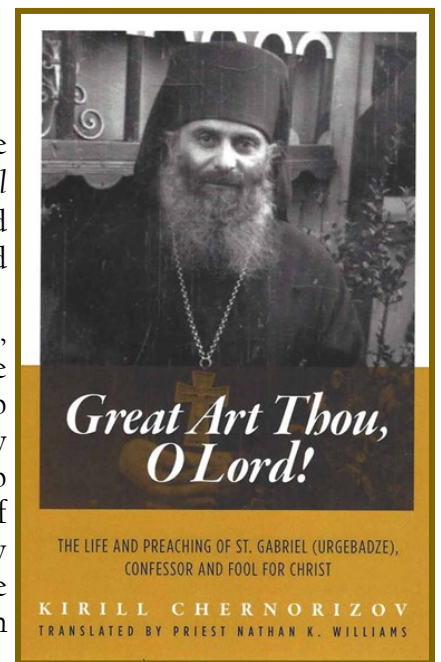
Newly published from St. Innocent Press and available now in the Bookstore is *Great Art Thou, O Lord! The Life and Preaching of St. Gabriel (Urgebadzé), Confessor and Fool for Christ*, by Kirill Chernorizov. Swift and pleasant to read, this book includes a series of recollections from family and friends of St. Gabriel's remarkable life.

From the back cover: Born in 1929 in the Soviet Republic of Georgia, he fervently pursued the spiritual life under the guidance of holy elders. He famously rebuked the idolatry of the godless civil authorities, setting fire to a massive banner of Lenin at a public celebration. For this he was badly beaten, imprisoned and almost executed. With God's help, he survived to nurture the next generation of Georgian faithful and to see the fall of Communism. Since he reposed in 1995, his veneration has grown rapidly both in Georgia and abroad, boosted by countless miracles such as those worked by his jacket, which healed a fourteen-year-old boy of a brain aneurysm and continues to heal many.

Words of St. Gabriel: "Kindness will open to you the doors of Paradise, humility will lead you into it, and love will enable you to behold God. Only in true love can God be seen, because God is Love."

Looking forward to seeing you in the Bookstore for your copy and other devotional needs this Nativity Season.

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



Remembering the Church through Planned Giving

“...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...” Matthew 6:20 (RSV)

For most people, the greatest financial gift we are able to give is what we leave behind when we fall asleep in the Lord. Making a Planned Gift to the Church is an opportunity to leave a legacy that strengthens God’s ministry and expresses our thankfulness to Him. Through a charitable gift, you can help sustain our place of worship first and foremost, allowing the Church to continue to meet the spiritual needs of our current faithful as well as future generations; as well as have a significant positive effect on the ministries of the Church and the people whose lives are changed by them. A charitable gift may also give you substantial current tax benefits as well as estate tax benefits. As part of our Parish Stewardship Committee’s ongoing efforts, we are inquiring if parishioners would be interested in attending a Church hosted meeting/workshop, where estate planning attorneys would come and discuss how basic estate planning tools work such as wills, trusts, powers of attorney, and the probate process; as well as how Planned Giving can be incorporated into one’s estate plan.

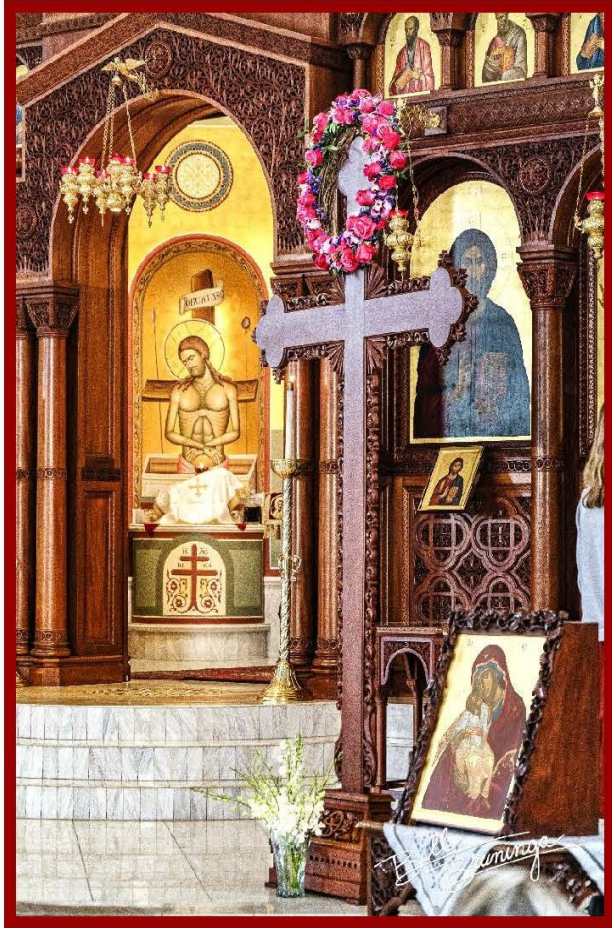
Giving to the Church is an opportunity to examine our priorities and values. It is an opportunity to express our thankfulness, to give of ourselves and to grow in grace. Giving is not a substitute of our commitment – it is an expression of our commitment. Come And See what we can do together with your support.

CONTACT THE CHURCH OFFICE FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you are interested in attending a future meeting/workshop, please email legacygiving@vegasgreekorthodox.com or call the Church at (702) 221-8245 to be placed on the invite notification list for any future events.

SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

5300 El Camino Road, Las Vegas, NV 89118



Stewardship 2024

LET GOD'S LOVE GUIDE US

Let Us Love One
Another, That With One
Mind We May Confess.

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

+++++

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

“Let God’s Love Guide Us”

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 2024 of \$ _____.

Signed: _____

Signed: _____

Orthodox Christian: Yes No

Orthodox Christian: Yes No

Others sharing in the gift (children): _____

Ministry News

Church School

Hi Everyone! First of all, thank you for bringing your children this year. We have full classrooms with many ready to learn about our wonderful Faith.

We have closed enrollment for the 2023-2024 school year and will not be receiving new students until next Fall for the 2024-2025 year. If you have any questions or concerns about this, please reach out to me.

Our next all-classes event will be our Nativity Craft activity, which will take place *on Sunday, December 17*, right after Church School in Kokkos Hall. We will have a craft and will be serving pizza. We hope to see you there.

Are you looking to help? Please ask your child's teacher if they need anything. It could be snacks, classroom helpers or maybe even classroom cleanup at the end of class.

Thank you for letting us teach your children about the Greek Orthodox Church and help them grow in their relationship with God.

Save the Dates:

December 17 - Nativity Craft Activity after Class.

December 24 - Family Worship Sunday.

December 31 - Family Worship Sunday.

January 7 - Family Worship Sunday: Cutting of the Community Vasilopita.

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



Combined Youth and Parish Event

Dear Kids, Teenagers, Parents, and Beloved Community Members:

We are all getting ready to celebrate the Nativity or the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who prepares our way to salvation. In that spirit, we are extending our invite to everyone in the Parish who wishes to join us *on Saturday, December 9 from 3:00 to 5:00 pm* to decorate our 12-foot-tall Parish Christmas Tree in Panos Hall.

We will have a fast-friendly potluck, we will be listening to Christmas music, enjoy a wonderful fellowship with Parish friends and also a brief discussion with Father Florin. Please do not forget to bring an ornament or two to hang if you wish. Please confirm your participation by email at frflorin@vegasgreekorthodox.com.

With Much Love in Christ,

Father Florin, Maha Habiba and April Rivera, Youth Advisors

Kali Parea - For the 40+ Crowd

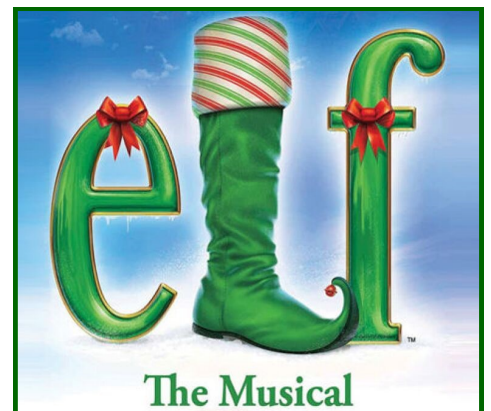
This month we will be meeting *on Saturday, December 9 at 2:00 pm*, to see "Elf: The Musical" at the Las Vegas Little Theatre in Chinatown.

The price for one ticket is \$30, but if we are a group of 30 people or more, the price goes down.

Please RSVP asap at frflorin@vegasgreekorthodox.com. We are all looking forward to seeing you for this event!

Have a Blessed Nativity Feast!

Demetrious Asim, Kali Parea Advisor



GOYA - Our Teen Ministry

Dear GOYANs,

We have three major events scheduled for the month of December.

First, we will all gather *on Saturday, December 2, beginning at 9:00 am*, for helping Philoptochos with pastry packing.

Then, as mentioned in the previous article, we will enjoy the Parish Christmas Tree Decoration in Panos Hall *on Saturday, December 9, 3:00 – 5:00 pm*, which is also meant to be a Parish event.

Finally, because during this Season in which our Lord, the Son of God, is born for us and for our salvation, it is important more than ever to remember those who suffer from the effects of homelessness. Therefore, we will gather for a service project to wrap gifts at the Nevada Partnership for Homeless Youth (NPHY) near UNLV. The Folk Dance groups will be joining us too! *While we are planning for Saturday, December 16, please look to the Weekly Bulletin for confirmation of the date and time.* Please show up promptly when our 90 minute slot is announced. There is no need to bring anything, as everything we need will be there. But please, dress warmly because we are going to sit outside.

If you have questions, please contact Maha, Sia or Father Florin – and please remember to RSVP at frflorin@vegasgreekorthodox.com. Thank you and see you soon!

Blessed Christmas with Love, Father Florin and Maha Habiba, GOYA Advisors

Greek Folk Dance

We would like to thank the community for the wonderful support during our Chili Luncheon! It was a great success, and we could not have done it without the help of all our dance families and, of course, the cooks, Steve Thompson and Steve Tzelalis! Thanks so much!

Please join us for an Adult Greek Dance Lesson! *On Friday, December 1, from 7:00 to 9:00 pm*, our very own Bessie Stavropoulos will be leading this lesson! Learn all the moves so that you can join in wherever Greeks are dancing! The lesson is \$15, and it includes light snacks. All proceeds will benefit our Dance Ministry.

We are continuing our annual tradition with our Christmas Caroling *on December 9*. The dancers sing a medley of Greek and English Christmas Carols. Please consider having the dancers spread the Christmas cheer at your home or business for a donation. Forms are available in this issue of *The Desert Messenger* or with Karen in the Church Office. Then, *on December 17*, we will be hosting our annual Fasolada Luncheon during Fellowship.

Finally, the Dance Groups will be joining GOYA for a service project to wrap gifts at the Nevada Partnership for Homeless Youth (NPHY) near UNLV. *While we are planning for Saturday, December 16, please look to the Weekly Bulletin for confirmation of the date and time.* Please show up promptly when our 90 minute slot is announced.

Our dancers continue to practice hard every week, getting ready to show off their moves at FDF in February! We look forward to showing our moves at the FDF Preview in Panos Hall the Sunday before!

Much Gratitude, The Folk Dance Board

Young Adults - 18 Years through Early 30s

I would like to thank the “brave group” who showed up at Church last month for our Thanksgiving party. We enjoyed lots of food and some interesting discussions.

This month, join us *on Sunday, December 10, starting at 4:00 pm*. We will meet at Las Vegas Ballpark, where we will enjoy Christmas lights, tiny storefronts with artisan vendors and, if we want to, we can go ice skating. The admission ticket is \$34.

Please RSVP with me at frflorin@vegasgreekorthodox.com. Thank you and hope to see you all there!
In Christ, Father Florin

From Father Florin

“And him I saw, who bow’ d heavy with death unto the ground, yet made. His eyes, unfolded upward, gates to Heaven, praying forgiveness of the Almighty Sire, amidst that cruel conflict, on his foes, with looks that win compassion to their aim.” (Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy, Purgatory, Canto XV)

In the Divine Comedy, Dante looks upon a touching scene: The death, by stoning, of a young man who, as he is dying, asks for forgiveness for his persecutors. The great Christian poet was struck by the meekness of St. Stephen, whose martyrdom is related in all its glory in the *Acts of the Apostles (Chapters 6, 7)*. As he was being stoned, St. Stephen cried out, *“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”*

Stephen was one of the first to follow the Apostles. It is believed that he was either Greek, or a Jew educated in Greek culture. What is certain is that he was greatly appreciated by the community in Jerusalem, so much so that his name appears first among the seven men chosen as Deacons to assist the Apostles in their mission. A man *“filled with faith and the Holy Spirit,”* who worked wonders and miracles – but some members of the synagogue stirred up the people against him, with the elders and scribes saying he had blasphemed against Moses and against God. In the days following Pentecost, St. Stephen was hauled before the Sanhedrin, and accused by false witnesses of preaching that Jesus would *“destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us.”*

St. Stephen then gave a speech – the longest recorded in the *Acts of the Apostles* – in which he reviewed the history of salvation. God, he said, had prepared for the coming of Jesus, the Righteous One, but the leaders of the people had resisted the Holy Spirit, just as their fathers had persecuted the prophets. St. Stephen concluded his speech with the words, *“Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”* This final proclamation cost him dearly. With a loud cry, those present cast him out of the city *“and began to stone him.”*

The *Acts of the Apostles* says that among those who approved of Stephen’s execution was Saul, who persecuted the Christians, but later became the Apostle of the Gentiles – St Paul. As he breathed his last, St. Stephen, in imitation of Jesus, prayed that God might receive his spirit, and prayed for forgiveness for his murderers.

The place of St. Stephen’s martyrdom is traditionally identified as being close to the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem, where today there is a Church dedicated to the martyred Deacon. Christians immediately felt a great devotion to St. Stephen, a devotion that only grew when his relics were rediscovered in the early part of the fifth century. His life and martyrdom are portrayed in countless works of art. St. Stephen is traditionally pictured with the palm of martyrdom, or with stones that show how he died.

St. Stephen died just as our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God: Falsely accused, brought to unjust condemnation because he spoke the truth fearlessly. He reposed with his eyes trustfully fixed on God, and with a prayer of forgiveness on his lips.

Through the prayers of St. Stephen, the First Martyr, let us also ask from our Creator for a Christian end to our lives, in the same spirit, with courage, total trust and forgiving love! Amen!



Fr. F. J. Ristade.

Forerunners - Our Seniors Fellowship

The Forerunners November Luncheon was a big hit! We enjoyed delicious food prepared by Peter Papas and Yassou! Thank you to all who came out; it was great to see you!

Mark your calendars for our Christmas Party *on Monday, December 11 at 11:30 am in Kokkos Hall*. We are opening the party to all Parish members, not just Seniors. Price is \$20. Please RSVP with Karen *by Tuesday, December 5*, so we know how many people to prepare for. We will have a Secret Santa gift exchange if you wish to participate (gifts no more than \$20), surprise entertainment and two \$100 Cash Grand Prizes. Please call me if you have any questions.

The Forerunners had a great year, and we look forward to another year together. Our highlights include very enjoyable luncheons, our annual donation to the Church of \$1,000, and support of the following charities: Guide Dogs for the Blind, Guide Dog Foundation, Service Dogs for Our Veterans, Semper K9 Assistance Dogs and Paws for Purple Hearts.

We wish you Happy Holidays!

Love in Christ, Paula Kelesis for the Forerunners



Daughters of Penelope



*The Daughters of Penelope wish everyone a very Merry Christmas!
Christ is Born! Glorify Him!
Καλά Χριστούγεννα!*

A Grand Event: Gus Flangas Receives Ariston Award



October 28, 2023



Dancing with the Greeks!

Please Join us for an

Adult Greek Dance Class

led by **Bessie Stavropoulos**

Friday, December 1, 2023

7-9 pm

Panos Hall

\$15

Includes light snacks

All proceeds to benefit the Greek Folk Dance Ministry



Let's celebrate the spirit of Christmas!

Please invite us to your home or business to spread some Christmas cheer!

Christmas Caroling

We will sing traditional Greek and English Christmas carols on your front porch!

The program will last approximately 15 minutes.

If you would like to have the carolers come to your home, please fill out the following and return to any Folk Dance Board Member or the Church office by December 4, 2023

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

Saturday, December 9, 2023

****You will be contacted 3 days prior in order to confirm the time we will arrive****

Questions? Contact Sia Dalacas at aeconomy@hotmail.com or 951-285-4970

ALL PROCEEDS TO BENEFIT THE GREEK FOLK DANCE MINISTRY

YOUR SUPPORT IS GREATLY APPRECIATED



Dear Father John, Father Florin and Beloved Fellow Parishioners:

With every good intention this letter is intended to refresh the memory of our community and/or familiarize those of us who may be unaware of the history of the *Hellenic Historical Society*.

In 2003, at the Parish Assembly of that year, the *Hellenic Historical Society* (HHS) was established. From that time through 2009 a concentrated effort was made by our archivists to systematically collect and preserve the first 50 years of history of our St. John the Baptist Church Community and the Greek Community at large in Las Vegas and Nevada. This monumental undertaking guaranteed that our history has not been lost.

In 2009 our community was able to enjoy the fruits of that labor at the 50th Anniversary Celebration. During the 3-day celebration of *Our Golden Heritage*, 740 chronologically ordered display boards with a program guide, presenting approximately 7,500 documents, letters, charters, books, photos, newspaper clippings, invitations, etc. were mounted on the walls of Panos Hall and on the walls of the foyer.

In 2019 at the 2-day 60th Anniversary Celebration of our community, *Our Diamond Jubilee*, we were able to further enjoy the fruits of that initial labor in addition to 50 new display boards. These displays were reproduced and those interested can find five large albums in the Church Library.

Please remember how valuable and interesting our story has been. Too many of us do not know of the events that led us to this magnificent Church where we are today. There are **many gaps in the history** which we would like to fill. To further preserve a more inclusive and detailed history we are asking the Parish Council, the Ministries and Pan Orthodox organizations to **select a member of their body to act as historian to gather past, present and future records and to share these documents with the Hellenic Historical Society.**

We welcome any and all submissions from any member of the community who has material pertinent to the St. John the Baptist Church Community and the Greek Community at large in Las Vegas and Nevada.

We look forward to receiving your historical materials. Please see the guidelines for your submissions.

We count on your continued support of this most important ministry.

Thank you kindly.

Your Sisters in Christ, for Hellenic Historical Society.

Nitsa Filios
nitsalv@aol.com
702 595-6888

Cheryl Pandelis
cheryl.pandelis@outlook.com
702 338-1601

Susan Stamis
susanstamis@gmail.com
702 460-9954



SPECIFICATIONS FOR SUBMISSIONS

- a) actual materials to **Karen Rawlinson at St. John Church Office (702 221-8245)**
(a receipt will be issued for temporarily loaned or permanently donated items)
- b) digital materials (**high resolution** scanned documents, captioned photos, PDF's, etc.).
to **susanstamis@gmail.com**

SUGGESTED MATERIALS *(including but not limited to)*

- a) Documents
- b) Letters
- c) Charters
- d) Books
- e) Newspaper pages or clippings
- f) Invitations
- g) Photos (please include)
 - 1. name of event
 - 2. date of event
 - 3. names of people
 - a) labeled left to right
 - b) front row, second row, third row etc.

We count on your continued support of this most important ministry.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

Nitsa Filios
nitsalv@aol.com
702 595-6888

Cheryl Pandelis
cheryl.pandelis@outlook.com
702 338-1601

Susan Stamis
susanstamis@gmail.com
702 460-9954

**2023
Stewardship
Report
(as of 11/27/23)**

Stewardship Gifts Pledged: \$577,781 (\$541,712 in 2022)
 Stewardship Gifts Received: \$526,053 (\$488,090 in 2022)
 Unfulfilled Pledge Balance: \$51,728 (\$53,622 in 2022)
 Stewardship Families Pledged: 448 (416 in 2022)
 2023 Goal: \$600,000 . . . Keep the Pledges Coming!

**“WALK
IN
LOVE”
(Ephesians 5:2)**

<u>Average Pledge</u>	<u>No. of Families</u>	<u>Amount Pledged</u>
\$1 - \$500	216	\$ 51,873
\$501 - \$1,000	87	\$ 68,717
\$1,001 - \$2,500	99	\$156,168
\$2,501 - \$5,000	26	\$ 97,689
\$5,001 - \$9999	14	\$ 85,114
\$10,000 & Above	6	\$118,220
Total Families	448	\$577,781

**Church Account Summaries
October 2023**

Nevada State Bank Accounts	September	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	October	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
General Operating Account (GOA)	\$42,343.01	\$101,279.35	\$116,048.29	91,449.02	\$124,462.59	\$43,759.04	
Community and Education (C&E)	\$22,335.49					\$22,335.49	
Greek Food Festival (GFF)	\$721,814.24	14,545.31		\$192,447.69	\$369,616.49	\$174,295.37	\$50K to B&M - \$68,753 to GOA for TC payment. \$38,369.37 to GOA for operating expenses
Designated, Restricted & Other (DR&O)	\$260,286.93	\$6,187.76		\$341.89	\$1,655.80	\$264,477.00	
Building & Maintenance (B&M)	\$72,961.69	\$319.88	\$97,000.00	\$10.00		\$170,271.57	
Folk Dance Group	\$19,981.82	\$2,327.00		\$10.00		\$22,298.82	
Hellenic Historical Society	\$3,250.47					\$3,250.47	
Designated Funds	September	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	October	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Bookstore	\$33,414.01	\$5,287.93		\$341.89	\$1,655.80	\$36,704.25	
Restricted Funds	September	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	October	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
ICON	\$11,632.27	\$749.83				\$12,382.10	
Faithtree	\$1,626.39					\$1,626.39	
Youth Choir	\$2,989.18					\$2,989.18	
Church School	\$137,141.44					\$137,141.44	
GOYA	\$530.36					\$530.36	
Eyler Memorial Fund	\$19,940.15	\$150.00				\$20,090.15	
Emergency Fund	\$5,000.00					\$5,000.00	
Three Priests	\$47,573.13					\$47,573.13	
Altar Servers	\$440.00					\$440.00	
Designated, Restricted and Other Total	\$260,286.93	\$6,187.76	\$0.00	\$341.89	\$1,655.80	\$264,477.00	
Building and Maintenance Funds	September	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	October	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Building Fund	-\$18,285.73	\$319.88	\$50,000.00	\$10.00		\$32,024.15	20% Net Funds transferred from Food Festival
Panos Flooring Repair	\$23,722.83					\$23,722.83	
Roof Appeal	\$10,283.22					\$10,283.22	
HVAC	\$48,351.50		\$47,000.00			\$95,351.50	Return of HVAC deposit from vendor
Giving Tree	\$8,889.87					\$8,889.87	
Lighting	\$0.00					\$0.00	
Building & Maintenance Funds Total	\$72,961.69	\$319.88	\$97,000.00	\$10.00	\$0.00	\$170,271.57	
Other Funds	September	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	October	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Kokkos Scholarship Fund	\$67,281.39				\$3,610.42	\$63,670.97	as of 10.31.23
Commonwealth Investments (Icon)	\$122,227.89				3,564.07	\$118,663.82	Change in Investment

October 2023 Candles **\$6,364.83**
 October 2023 Trays **\$4,995.40**
Total October 2023 Candles & Trays \$11,360.23

The Desert Messenger

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THE DESERT MESSENGER

The Way of the Lord

*Come, believers, let us see the place
where Christ has been Born. With
the Magi, those three kings who
from the orient are, now let us
follow to where the star is
proceeding. Ceaselessly do Angels
sing praises there. Shepherds in the
field sing a worthy song, saying:*

*Glory in the Highest be to Him
Who was Born today in the grotto
from the Virgin and Theotokos, in
Bethlehem of Judea.*

*(Kathisma, Orthros of the Nativity
of Christ, Translated by
Father Seraphim Dedes)*

