

The Desert



Messenger

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

Volume 16, Issue 2 St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Las Vegas, NV

February 2018

From Father John

Beloved in Christ:

If we follow our Church Calendar and attend the Sunday Orthros and Liturgies we know that our Holy Orthodox Church is preparing us mentally, physically and spiritually for *Lent, the forty-day Great Fast*, which begins *Monday, February 19*. But for the many Orthodox who do not regularly follow the Church Calendar or rarely attend Sunday services, God's grace is still at work – as they will in some way find out when Holy Week is and attend at the proverbial "eleventh hour" the services for Holy Unction, Holy Friday and Holy Pascha (even if only long enough to light the Paschal Candle).

Which begs the question: If God's beneficence is freely offered to all – to those who are faithful from the first hour as well as to those who come around at the eleventh hour – then why should we even attempt to follow the strict fast and attend the many services of the Lenten season at all? While there are many answers to this question, perhaps the most compelling reason for "Doing Lent" is because this period is, by design, "The Season of Repentance": "Behold, now is the accepted time . . . Let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, that having sailed across the great sea of the Fast, we may reach the third-day Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of our souls." (*Aposticha, Sunday of Forgiveness*)

If I think I am okay and have no need to repent, but rather that repentance is for "the serious offenders," then I am no different than the Pharisees and Scribes who criticized our Lord Jesus Christ for dining with tax collectors and sinners. Just consider Christ's response to each of us who at one time or another believe we are righteous (and quick to judge others): *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* (Luke 5:31, Mark 2:17) Our Lord came in the flesh, willingly took up His Cross, died for our sins, resurrected from the dead and ascended into Heaven . . . in order to fulfill all righteousness: As we are fallen humans, all of our so-called deeds of righteousness – from times of antiquity until the present – are, in the words of the Prophet Isaiah, *"like filthy rags."* (Isaiah 64:6) Christ our God, Who alone is the Righteous One and the Great Physician, established His Church so that we may receive His continuous grace and healing through prayer, fasting, worship and especially in the Holy Mysteries.

By adhering to the Church Calendar, especially during the Lenten Season, we reap many benefits: First and foremost, we put God first in our lives, as we follow His command to fast and pray – to combat our personal demons and sins. (Matthew 17:21) Secondly, through fasting and almsgiving (or charity) we become less self-centered and more other-directed. Thirdly, by changing our schedules to participate in the many Lenten services, our focus shifts toward the more needful things that must be tended to – like Mary we find ourselves more often at the Lord's feet, rather than like Martha, busied and bothered by daily fleeting distractions. (Luke 10:41) Fourthly, as we attempt to follow a daily rule of prayer and Scripture reading, we become more still, more quiet, more peaceful and more self-aware. It naturally follows that our self-awareness leads to sorrow for our personal sinfulness, which opens the door to genuine repentance (μετάνοια, "change of mind") – hence, Holy Confession is an essential part of fasting. Finally, through true repentance and confession, we experience firsthand the love, mercy and joy of our reunion with Christ.

While God's grace abounds to those who "Do Lent" from the start as well as to those who arrive at the eleventh hour of Pascha (often to depart quickly again) – that desire to remain united with Christ is renewed powerfully through engaging in the "Season of Repentance."

Καλή Σαρακοστή – Blessed Lent! With love in Christ,

WORSHIP SCHEDULE

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

Triodion Begins: No Fasting This Week

Friday, February 2/*The Meeting of our Lord in the Temple*

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy

Epistle: Hebrews 7:7-17

Gospel: Luke 2:22-40

Sunday, February 4/*Sunday of the Prodigal Son/ St. Isidore of Pelusium*

Orthros: Tone Two

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

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Gospel: Luke 15:11-32

Fast on Wednesday and Friday

Saturday, February 10/*1st Saturday of Souls/ Priest-Martyr Haralambos, the Wonderworker*

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial

Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

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

Sunday, February 11/*Meatfare Sunday/ Commemoration of Our Lord's Second Coming/ Empress Theodora/Martyr Vlassios of Sebaste*

Orthros: Tone Three

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

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

Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

Abstain from Meat This Week

Saturday, February 17/*2nd Saturday of Souls*

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial

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

Gospel: Matthew 6:1-3

Sunday, February 18/*Cheesefare Sunday/ Expulsion of Adam from Paradise/ Forgiveness Sunday/St. Leo Pope of Rome*

Orthros: Tone Four

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

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

Gospel: Matthew 6:14-21

6:00 pm Forgiveness Vespers

Lent Begins:

Abstain from Meat and Dairy for 40 Days

Monday, February 19/*Clean Monday/*

First Day of Lent

6:30 pm Great Compline

Wednesday, February 21

6:30 pm Presanctified Liturgy

Friday, February 23

7:00 pm 1st Salutations to the Theotokos

Saturday, February 24/*3rd Saturday of Souls/ Miracle of St. Theodore and the Kollyva/1st and 2nd Finding of the Head of St. John the Baptist*

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial

Epistle: 2 Timothy 2:1-10

Gospel: Matthew 11:2-15

Sunday, February 25/*1st Sunday of Lent/ Triumph of Orthodoxy/Restoration of the Holy Icons/St. Tarasios, Patriarch of Constantinople*

Orthros: Tone Five (First Plagal)

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

Epistle: Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-40

Gospel: John 1:44-52

Procession of Icons follows Liturgy

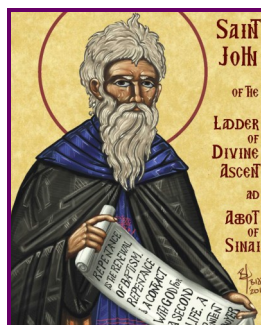
5:00 pm Lenten Pan-Orthodox Vespers at St. Paul Orthodox Church (OCA)

Monday, February 26

6:30 pm Great Compline

Wednesday, February 28

6:30 pm Presanctified Liturgy



"A sure sign of the deadening of the soul is the avoidance of Church services." (St. John Climacos)

SUNDAY SCHEDULE

FEBRUARY 4

Ushers: John Nicholas, Demetrious Asim, Bessie Stavropoulos, George Bochanis, John Matsis and Adam Bieker

Fellowship: Forerunners, the Seniors of St. John the Baptist

FEBRUARY 11

Ushers: Gus Flangas, Mike Beeler, Mark Karris, Stacy Mavrantonis, Justina Szukiewicz and John Koutsulis

Memorial: Nicholas Salon (6 months); Anthony and Eugenia Dalacas

Fellowship: Folk Dance Groups

FEBRUARY 18

Ushers: Bessie Stavropoulos, George Bochanis, John Matsis, John Nicholas, Demetrious Asim and Mark Karris

Fellowship: Daughters of Penelope

FEBRUARY 25

Ushers: John Koutsulis, Adam Bieker, Justina Szukiewicz, Mike Beeler, Gus Flangas and Stacy Mavrantonis

Fellowship: Ladies Philoptochos Society

HOLY CONFESSION DURING LENT

Father John is available for Confession by appointment only during the weekdays of Lent. Do not delay, as Confessions will not be heard Holy Week.

Our Community Registry

Baptized into Christ: Na Mas Zisi!

Josef, son of Truman Celestine and Luwam Ghermay, on December 23, 2017.

Godparent: Beniam Mekanen.

Matthew, son of Thomas and Elizabeth Paikos, on January 20, 2018.

Godparent: Bill Paikos.

Joseph (Maddox), son of Joseph and Nitsa Varner, on January 21, 2018.

Godparent: Alyssa Gianakoulis.

Nicoletta (Lennyn), daughter of Joseph and Nitsa Varner, on January 21, 2018.

Godparent: Nicholas Gianakoulis.

Chrismations

Vasiliki (Brigitte) Tringas on January 1, 2018. Sponsor: Stephanie Demoleas.

Marina (Alissa) Bernier on January 21, 2018. Sponsor: Kitty Komashko Gott.

Fallen Asleep in the Lord: Eternal Memory!

Nicole Niemeyer on December 28, 2017. Funeral on January 4, 2018.

Vasiliki Vithoulkas on December 6, 2017. Funeral on January 22, 2018.

Dimitrios Bougalis on January 19, 2018. Funeral on January 26, 2018.

Parish Council Report

We are off and running for the New Year with a renewed spirit, ready to work toward fulfilling a successful year for our Parish. We kicked off the New Year with a luncheon in honor of St. John the Baptist, the namesake of our Church. It was well attended and the proceeds went to our Folk Dance Ministry to help them attend their Dance Competition at the Faith Dance Fellowship (FDF) Festival in San Francisco. A good time was had by all and we got to see our youth perform their dances in preparation for FDF. We want to thank John Koutsulis for all his hard work in putting together the event, and everyone who pitched in to help make it a success.

Our talented Folk Dancers represented our Parish very well at FDF. It was a successful event and a great experience for those who attended. Congratulations and thank you to the Folk Dance Board, Directors, Dancers, and everyone involved for a tremendous job well done.

On a very exciting note, the Ladies Philoptochos has taken the lead to help retire the mortgage on our Community Center. They have put together a very impressive plan to get it done in a 10 month to one year time frame and the entire Parish Council has pledged to get strongly behind the effort. We encourage everyone to get involved and help with this well thought-out plan. It would be absolutely incredible to celebrate the start of the next year, debt free. Please step up when the time comes.

We cannot over emphasize the importance of Stewardship to our Church. The perpetual shortfall in our Stewardship significantly limits what our Church can do going forward in the way of capital improvements, greater funding for our ministries, maintaining and repairing our facilities and fulfilling our vision for the future, especially with our youth. Enough is enough. We as a Parish are way past due in getting this fixed. For more than 20 years we have been harping about the importance of Stewardship and it seems to fall on deaf ears for a great many of our parishioners. Make no mistake, it takes the efforts of the entire Parish to have a Church. It is time for every Parishioner to get fully involved in Stewardship so that we as a Church can stop spinning our wheels every year figuring how to keep things moving. Please look into your hearts and “give back” and give thanks for the many blessings God has bestowed upon you.

Pertaining to the Iconography, we are still working diligently on getting the 501(c)(3) designation. We recently hit a snag, but we are fixing it. The IRS wants a certain type of Financial Statement put together using a very specific form. We are presently getting this done for submission. It is our fervent hope to have better news in the coming month or two. This is a great source of frustration; however, we ask for everyone's patience while we work toward getting the Iconographers allowed into the Country to finish this important project. We will continue to keep you informed of any developments.

We have many projects on which we are presently working, including getting the roofs fixed, revamping the C&E program, and finishing the parking lot. To begin, this last spate of recent rain showers revealed several more leaks in the Church and the Community Center inside the kitchen. We are presently working with the roofing company to find these last leaks and get them fixed once and for all. We recently removed the ceiling in the women's bathroom in the Church, where we found a major source of the leakage. In early February we are bringing out a water truck to shoot water up on the roof while the roofing company is present to try and pinpoint any other leaks and get them repaired. In addition we are again working on the C&E Program to make the Community Center more accessible to Stewards and more palatable for other outside events. As this project progresses, we will update everyone. Also, last month we informed you about getting the parking lot resurfaced and re-striped. After seeing part of the work by the company we hired, we ordered them to stop because their work was utterly deficient. We are presently searching for a different company to finish the work, hopefully in the coming months.

The dates for this year's Greek Food Festival are September 14, 15 and 16. We will be starting the planning meetings soon, so please look out for the dates and step up and help. Every year, we get better and better.

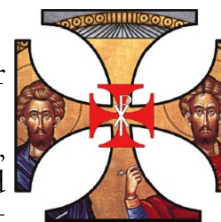
In closing and as usual, we want to thank the various Church ministries and organizations, and the many individuals for all the work they do and have done to help us secure the future of the Church for ourselves and most importantly, for our children. Please step forward whenever you can and pitch in, as we move forward to make our Church better.

May God bless us all during the Lenten Season. **Gus Flangas, Parish Council President**

Philoptochos News

Dearest Sisters of Philoptochos,

I pray that all of you are having a great new year with your families and loved ones.



On January 7 we celebrated the Name Day of our Church, St. John the Baptist. Special thanks to Dora Hart and Panagiota Lieblen, for making and providing the four large Vasilopites for our community. Two of the Vasilopites were cut and distributed by Father John to the congregation in celebration of St. Basil, one was cut and distributed with the antidoron, and the fourth one was purchased by Cheryl Pandelis for \$150, which she donated to the Priest's Discretionary Fund, which provides aid to the people in need in our community. The collection was \$1,201, in support of St. Basil's Academy. Sincere appreciation is extended to Cheryl Pandelis, to the Church organizations and all the individuals for their love and generosity!

On January 9 we had our first General Meeting of 2018. It was full of renewed hope and goals for wonderful projects so we can continue to grow.

Below are our February events:

- **Sunday, February 11: Departed Members Memorial.** All Philoptochos women are asked to attend with respect, prayer and reverence for the memorial service, in honor of our beloved Philoptochos Members who have fallen asleep in the Lord. Please come to Church appropriately dressed and sit in the first three pews on the right. Let us remember that *they* are the ones who preserved and carried on to us the sacred trust given to them by God to care for the poor, the young, the elderly, the sick, the orphaned, and the widowed. We will have a table in Panos Hall with photos and mementos, so please provide any pictures you might have. Kollyva will be offered.

- **Sunday, February 11: Go Red for Women.** February is National Heart Awareness Month, which helps raise attention for heart disease. According to the American Heart Association®, heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States. Every year 1 in 4 deaths is caused by heart disease. The most common type is coronary heart disease, which often appears as a heart attack. High cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, and secondhand smoke are also risk factors associated with heart disease. Be especially good to your heart this month and make some positive changes for a healthier you. Please wear red for heart awareness.

- **Monday, February 19: Lent Begins.**

- **Sunday, February 25: Kids 'n' Cancer Collection and Fellowship.** The mission of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco Philoptochos Kids 'n' Cancer Ministry is to provide support for children afflicted with cancer and other life-threatening diseases. The Kids 'n' Cancer Camp Agape Ministry offers a life-changing, all-expense paid experience for children and their families. It provides opportunities for enjoyment, learning, and building self-esteem and confidence in a safe setting. The kindness and caring that surrounds them offers an ideal environment for therapy and healing. Please be generous.

- **Project 150:** Please make *Prom* possible for more than 1,500 ladies and gentlemen who will attend this annual high school event and shop for *free* with a high school student ID. Las Vegas Prom Closet, presented by Project 150 and Zappos.com, is in need of inventory for this year's local proms. *Please sponsor or donate the following:* Prom or formal dresses, suits, shoes, ties, purses, and accessories. *Plus-size attire, men's formal wear, and men's belts are especially needed.* For more information, please contact our Social Services Chair, Geri Kypreos, at gkypreos@aol.com.

I look forward to seeing you at all our events!

With Love in Christ, Vicky Palivos, Philoptochos President

Please join us and become a "Friend of the Poor."

Please contact the Membership Committee at

lasvegasphiloptochosstjohn@gmail.com.

The Clark County Orthodox Clergy Association presents

2018 LENTEN RETREAT

Saturday, March 10, 2018

St. Paul Orthodox Church • 5400 Annie Oakley Drive

*Three Ways to Know the Body of Christ
as Revealed in Holy Scripture*



Father Chad Hatfield

President, St. Vladimir Orthodox Theological Seminary

SCHEDULE

Divine Liturgy, 9:00 AM

Continental Breakfast

FIRST SESSION, 10:30 AM

Lunch, 12:00 PM

SECOND SESSION, 1:00 PM

Break

THIRD SESSION/Q&A

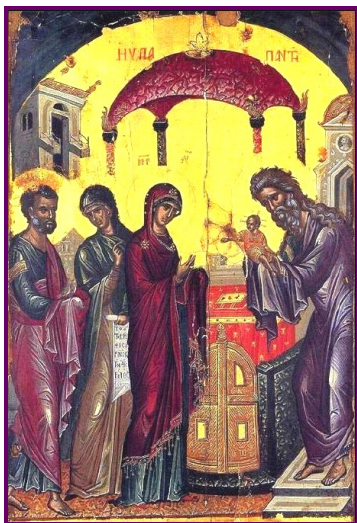
GREAT VESPERS, 4:00 PM

COST: \$15.00 per person

Checks payable to St. Paul Orthodox Church

From Father Seraphim

“A woman when she is giving birth has sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembers no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.” (John 16:21)



As a new father for the second time, the Holy Feast of Christ's encounter with the elder Simeon, celebrated on *February 2*, receives a special meaning in my life this year. My family too is waiting to fulfill the forty days. In the ancient Jewish tradition the forty day blessing was in remembrance of the Exodus, when God smote the firstborn sons of Egypt and saved the firstborn of the Hebrew nation. For Orthodox Christians, the forty day blessing reveals something more profound: Our Lord, the Law-Giver, humbly participated in the mystery of obeying His own Law. We too allow the woman's body to heal and offer back to God the Giver of Life not only our first born male children after forty days, but rather, *every single child* is offered back in gratitude for His gift of life to us!

The miraculous act of birth is sanctified with prayers on the very first day for the mother, naming prayers for the baby on the eighth day (in contemporary practice we read the first and eighth day prayers together on the first day), and is completed in the short but significant Forty-Day Blessing service of our Church. On the fortieth day, the priest blesses the mother and then takes the infant in his arms and presents it to God before the Holy Altar while saying the very same words of Simeon as he received the long-awaited baby Jesus in his embrace. (*Luke 2:29-32*) These blessing prayers speak of a further union with Christ and Divine illumination in the waters of Holy Baptism, another mystery now open and ready to be fulfilled. Thus, the trajectory of all the children of our Faith is set for the Kingdom of God from infancy.

This liturgical ceremony is based on the story of Christ's own Forty-Day Blessing, recorded only in the *Gospel of Luke (2:22-40)*, which notes that, forty days after the Nativity, Mary and Joseph brought the infant Christ to the temple, in accordance with the Jewish ceremony for the consecration of the firstborn and the fulfillment of the days of ritual purification for the mother. Luke informs us that the child's parents *“brought a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons”* for the prescribed sacrifice, and we see the birds in the icon folded in Joseph's robe. Luke further notes that, upon entering the temple, Mary met a man named Simeon, who had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Savior. We see him installed behind the altar of sacrifice covered by a canopy, stooping to receive the child in his covered arms. The transaction unfolds before, or perhaps across the space of the sacrificial table (veiled in a bright red cloth). The table itself is covered by a canopy and screened behind a pair of low doors whose panels form the sign of the cross.

The composition effectively echoes that of the Crucifixion, with Mary standing at the right hand of the cross, here replaced by the sacrificial table. From this point of view, the icon presents us with a liturgical Golgotha, anticipating the self-offering of the God of Israel on His own altar. The space of the temple, moreover, has been reconfigured as a Byzantine Church, as if the Mother of God were offering the child as a loaf of bread for the Eucharistic Liturgy. The Mosaic Law prescribed the offering of a young unblemished lamb, but if one could not afford this then the less expensive birds would suffice. It is not insignificant that the Eucharistic bread is also called the “Lamb,” symbolizing and truly becoming Christ Himself: “The Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world.” These images emphasize the belief that the Christ child is not simply being “presented” in the temple, but about to be literally sacrificed, and that this sacrifice is at the center of all Christianity.

One final thought about all this. The word “Υπαπαντή” is translated different ways in the English language: The “Presentation” of the Lord in the Temple; or, the “Meeting” of the Lord in the Temple. A more accurate and powerful translation is “Encounter.” The Elder Simeon's encounter with the Lord brought about his departure from this world!

(Continued on Page 8)

Stewardship and Community Outreach

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,



Friendly Reminders . . . Such a nice catch phrase for our home and work lives. This little expression also applies to our lives as Stewards of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church. Here is a short list of a few “friendly reminders”:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

“Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.” (Matthew 6:21)

“Acquire the Spirit of Peace and a thousand souls around you will be saved.” (St. Seraphim of Sarov)

Remember to use your time, talents and treasures in a full-hearted manner to be a genuine Steward of Christ's Holy Church, because without your gracious “giving” the Parish does not move forward, as there is no other way we are “funded.”

Filling out, returning and fulfilling a Stewardship Pledge Card each year is the *only* successful way the Parish is able to keep an accurate count of how many faithful we have in our community, participating in the life of the Church.

Everything that we have is from God – it is *all* a gift!

In Christ, Justina Szukiewicz, on behalf of the Stewardship & Community Committee



Adult Study with Father John

A Reflection on Lenten Prayers, Hymns and Scripture Readings

*Meets Every Wednesday 7:00 - 8:30 pm in the Church
During Lent: 8:00 - 9:00 pm (following Presanctified Liturgy)*

“For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.” (Romans 13:11)

From Father Seraphim (Continued from Page 7)

Art historians speculate that the iconography for this feast is the basis for the most popular and beloved image of our Orthodox spiritual heritage: The Mother and Child. The Holy Theotokos presenting her Child in the Temple is a moment in the story of salvation that we can “zoom in on.” Every icon of the Panagia holding her Son thus brings us to that moment as well, and standing before Mary we *take the place of Simeon*. The Theotokos presents her Son to each of us who stand in front of the iconostasis looking up at her so that we can encounter Him and come to know Him. If we choose to receive Christ and enter the mystery of that encounter, we too must die with Christ, must be ready to sacrifice our ego and crucify the flesh of our sinfulness. Few things erase the selfishness of the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, more than caring for our children and raising them as true Christians, for this requires us to become authentic Christians as well – prepared for the final and ultimate encounter with Christ when He returns in glory to judge the living and the dead.

With Love in Christ,

Father Seraphim

**#VEGAS STRONG.
ORTHODOXY STRONG.
LET'S MAKE STEWARDSHIP
STRONG IN 2018!
PLEASE PRAYERFULLY FILL OUT
YOUR 2018 PLEDGE CARD
AND RETURN IT TO CHURCH.
GOD BLESS US ALL!**



Parish Council Oath of Office

The 2018 Parish Council took the Oath of Office on Sunday, January 7. Pictured, left to right, are Justina Szukiewicz, Stacy Mavrantonis, John Matsis (Vice President), Adam Bieker, George Bochanis, Mike Beeler (Secretary), John Koutsulis, Gus Flangas (President) and John Nicholas. Not Pictured: Bessie Stavropoulos (Treasurer), Demetrious Asim (Assistant Treasurer) and Mark Karris.

-Photo by Bill Bruninga

"Put to death therefore what is earthly in you." (Colossians 3:5)

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Philoptochos: Vicky Palivos

Stewardship & Community Outreach:
Justina Szukiewicz

Choir: Athena Mertes

Chanters & Youth Choir:
Presvytera Maria Hondros

Church School: Eileen Koutsulis

Altar Servers: Alex & Eric Szukiewicz

GOYA:

Kouli Pouridis & June Likourinou

Orthodox Family Fellowship:
Jelena Boskovic & Amy Khuri

Moms & Tots:
Cassie Bieker

Young Adults:
Nicholas Asim & Fani Mavrantonis

Greek Folk Dance: Sia Dalacas

Greek School: Paula Kelesis

Mr. & Mrs.:

Fr. John, Fr. Seraphim & Presvyteres

Kali Parea: Demetrious Asim

Adult Basketball: George Chomakos

Forerunners: Marie & Gary Setian

Orthodox Bookstore:
Constantine Frangakis

Greek Food Festival: Gus Flangas

Hellenic Historical Society:
Cheryl Pandelis and Susan Stamis

Photography: Bill Bruninga

Youth and Family Ministries

Church School

Hi Everyone! Whew, what a busy January. It was like a mini Holy Week with Theophany, the Great Blessing of the Water, Great Vespers, the commemoration of St. John the Baptist, the Cutting of the Vasilopita, followed by the delicious luncheon.

Our Folk Dancers offered a fantastic performance at the luncheon – it was very exciting to see all of their hard work come together, with so many hours of practicing. Congratulations to all of our dancers at FDF!

What a blessing that the Church School received the Vasilopita coin this year: May we be blessed all year long through the prayers of St. Basil! Please make sure that your children are formally registered for Church School. There are registration forms on the bulletin boards outside of the classroom. Please fill out a form and hand it to either myself, your child's teacher or Karen in the Church Office.

Reminder: Please have your child bring an icon to Church on Sunday, February 25 for the Sunday of Orthodoxy. Our Church School students will participate in the Procession of Icons following the Liturgy.

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

Youth Choir News



WOW! The Youth Choir started their year with many blessings! First of all, little Nicholas Katopodis received the coin on behalf of the Youth Choir at our annual Community Vasilopita. May he, his family and all our Youth Choir members and families have a blessed and healthy New Year. We also chanted so *beautifully* on Sunday, January 21; we even had pizza for our accomplishments the last four months! A big shout-out goes to Jackson's grandmother, Christina Snow, for providing us with a delicious treat!

The Youth Choir will have its practice on *Sunday, February 4*. We will meet in the 4th and 5th Grade Classroom *at 12:15 pm*, right after Church School. The Youth Choir will chant the Divine Liturgy on *Sunday, February 11* – please meet in the front right side *by 9:40 am*. Our on-time track is getting better; thank you parents!

Lent is quickly approaching! The Youth Choir traditionally chants the responses at the Salutations Service to the Theotokos on Friday Evenings during Lent. Our first Friday of Lent is on *February 23: Practice is at 6:15 pm, the Service starts at 7:00 pm*. The rest of our Lent and Holy Week schedule will be sent via email.

May we all have a Blessed Lenten Season.

Love in Christ, Presvytera Maria

Moms & Tots

Lent is upon us!

Moms and Tots is excited to announce that we have merged together with Orthodox Family Fellowship (OFF)! This is our last article under Moms and Tots. All future events will follow under Orthodox Family Fellowship announcements.

Please bring your whole family to the *Lenten Mini-Retreat on Saturday, February 24 at 9:00 am* for the Saturday of Souls Divine Liturgy, followed by a light Lenten breakfast, free play to get the wiggles out, and an *11:00 am to 1:00 pm* discussion with arts and crafts.

Please see the OFF Mini Retreat flyer (on Page 16) and RSVP!

Blessed Lent! In Christ, Cassie Bieker



"Let the children come to Me, and do not hinder them." (Matthew 19:14)

Greek Folk Dance

We are back from the Metropolis Annual Folk Dance Festival that took place in San Francisco on January 11-15. It was a wonderful weekend of faith, dance and fellowship with thousands of other faithful from across the West Coast. We are so proud of all our dancers for their excellent performances and for representing our Church and community in a wonderful and positive way. Please check out our photos on Page 12.

Thank you so much to the Parish Council and all our fellow Parish Members who showed their support for our youth, by their enthusiastic presence and through their offerings, at our St. John the Baptist Name Day Luncheon and FDF Preview.

We will be taking a break in time for Great Lent and will resume again in late summer 2018 for our new season. Please look for registration forms for the 2018-2019 season beginning in June 2018. We welcome all dancers from age 4 and up.

With Much Gratitude, the Folk Dance Board

Orthodox Family Fellowship

Dear Families of St. John the Baptist,

We cannot wait to enjoy a day of ice skating together at the end of January. We would also like you all to mark your calendars for our next important event: *The annual Lenten Mini-Retreat, on Saturday, February 24, 9:00 am-1:00 pm*, for all kids 4-11 years old.

We will begin with Divine Liturgy at 9:00 am, followed by the Memorial service: so please have your children write down and submit the names of their loved ones who have fallen asleep in the Lord to be commemorated. *The Retreat will then start at 11:00 am and end at 1:00 pm.* (See the flyer on Page 16.) Please mark your calendars and come experience the beauty of our Faith!

Jelena Boskovic and Amy Khuri, OFF Advisors

GOYA ~ For Teenagers

This past month was a busy one for our Folk Dancers, and we are proud of them for their performances at FDF!

GOYA will continue the tradition of the *Sunday Night Meeting on Sunday, February 18 from 4:30 to 7:00 pm*. Join us for a Lenten dinner and spiritual discussion at 4:30 pm, followed by Forgiveness Vespers at 6:00 pm.

Also, please mark your calendars for GOYA's annual Lenten Overnight Retreat on Friday, March 16 through Saturday, March 17! There will be many of fun activities, dinner, and an opportunity to experience the Sacrament of Confession, spiritual discussions with Father John, Father Seraphim and our brother OCA Priests, and breakfast and lunch through Saturday afternoon.

Pack your PJ's, sleeping bags, pillows, toothbrushes, appropriate clothing for Church, and also comfortable clothes and shoes to play Capture the Flag on Friday night after the Salutations to the Theotokos!

We will definitely need a few extra moms and dads to stay with us Friday night, so if you can volunteer and help facilitate this incredible event for our youth, please let Father Seraphim, June or Kouli know ASAP!

Please watch for reminder text messages from Father Seraphim. If you are not receiving "Remind" text messages about GOYA events, please give your cell numbers to Father Seraphim or to Karen at the Church Office.

June Likourinou and Kouli Pouridis, GOYA Advisors

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14-15)



FAITH. DANCE. FELLOWSHIP.



2018 TEEN OVERNIGHT RETREAT



TAKING A LEAP OF FAITH
IN AN
AUGMENTED REALITY

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, MARCH 16 & 17
6:00 PM - 1:00 PM

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
ALL MIDDLE SCHOOL & HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
ARE WELCOME!

WHAT TO BRING:

WEAR CHURCH CLOTHES

ATHLETIC CLOTHES (SNEAKERS AND NOTHING TIGHT OR SHORT!)
FOR CAPTURE THE FLAG AND FOR THE FOLLOWING DAY.
SLEEPING CLOTHES, SLEEPING BAG, PILLOW, TOOTHBRUSH, ETC.

Adult and Young Adult Ministries

Young Adults



Thank you to everyone who joined us in ringing in the New Year ice skating at the Cosmo!

Now it is time to get our game faces for our next Young Adult event on *Sunday, February 4* at Sam Koutsulis' house. The Koutsulis family has graciously opened up their home so that YA can watch the Super Bowl! The festivities will begin with a House Blessing *at 1:30 pm*, with kick-off at 3:30 pm. Please bring snacks/finger foods and/or desserts.

For directions and to RSVP please email Father Seraphim or contact Sam. We look forward to seeing you there!

With love, Niko Asim and Fani Mavrantonis, Young Adults Advisors

Mr. & Mrs. - A Couples Fellowship

Dear M&M's,

We enjoyed a beautiful spiritual fellowship and meal together at the home of Mike and Effie Lekar in January – thank you for your hospitality!

This month, please join us at the home of *Karl and Benita Beeman on Saturday, February 24 at 6:00 pm*. The Beemans will provide the main course, so please bring a fast-appropriate side dish, drink or dessert to share. RSVP with Fr. Seraphim or the Beemans for directions. We hope to see you there!

In Christ, Father John, Father Seraphim, and their Presvyteres



Kali Parea - "Good Company" for the 40+ Crowd

Join us on *Saturday, February 10 at 5:00 pm* at the home of Penny Latelle. We will witness a House Blessing by Father John and Father Seraphim, followed by some nice *parea* ("good company") with appetizers. Please RSVP with Father Seraphim for directions frseraphim@vegasgreekorthodox.com.

Demetrious Asim, Advisor

Forerunners - The Seniors of St. John the Baptist

Our Forerunners started 2018 with a wonderful luncheon on January 22. Thanks to the generosity and kindness of Peter Eliakis, we had a super Vasilopita as well. Father John blessed us and cut the Vasilopita, distributing a piece to all those present. A delicious lunch was prepared and served by our Master Chef Sam and his crew. Lovely prizes were raffled and all enjoyed playing Bingo.



Our next gathering and luncheon will take place on *Monday, February 12* – just in time to wear red and celebrate Valentine's Day. A reminder to all that Lent begins on February 19 and Pascha is early this year (April 8).

If you have any suggestions for our monthly gatherings, please let us know. We want to make sure that we all enjoy our fellowship and time together.

We are not always aware of who is home bound: Please give this writer a call through the Church Office to make sure we extend our help, prayers and good wishes to them. Please take a minute and call Aphy Nikitas who is at present home-bound after taking a fall. We are sure it will be much appreciated. To all those in hospitals or facilities, our love, wishes and prayers are with you always.

Love in Christ, Victoria Xikis, on behalf of the Forerunners

"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends." (1 Corinthians 13:7-8)

Greek Language Classes



Greek School is back in full swing for the second semester. However, there is still an urgent need for a teacher to teach the 4-7 year-old class; if we do not have a teacher, that age group will unfortunately be without a class.

If you are interested, please contact *Paula* at (702) 249-4740.

Paula Kelesis, Greek School Director

Adult Basketball



Join us for a pick-up basketball game *every Monday evening (except the first day of Lent) at 7:00 pm, and 7:30 pm during Lent (following Great Compline), in Panos Hall.* Please call *George Chomakos* at (702) 523-8675 to be added to the basketball email list.

*"Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable."
(1 Corinthians 9:25)*

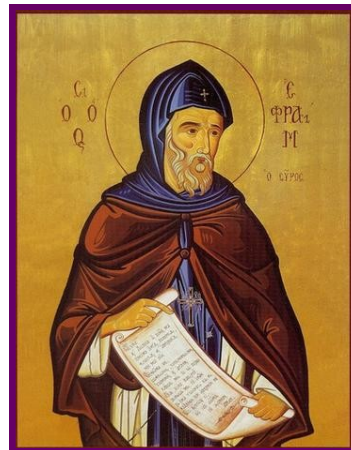
Notes from the Choir Loft



Great and Holy Lent begins this month! In preparation for Holy Week and Pascha, we will have rehearsals on *Fridays from 6:00 to 6:45 pm*, before the Salutations to the Theotokos. Please mark your calendars to attend these very important rehearsals, *starting on Friday, February 23.*

If you would like sing in the Choir, please feel free to join us anytime! The Lenten and Paschal seasons offer excellent opportunities to learn about the beautiful hymns that are sung during these great holy days!

Athena Mertes, Choir Director



*St. Ephraim
the Syrian*



Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian

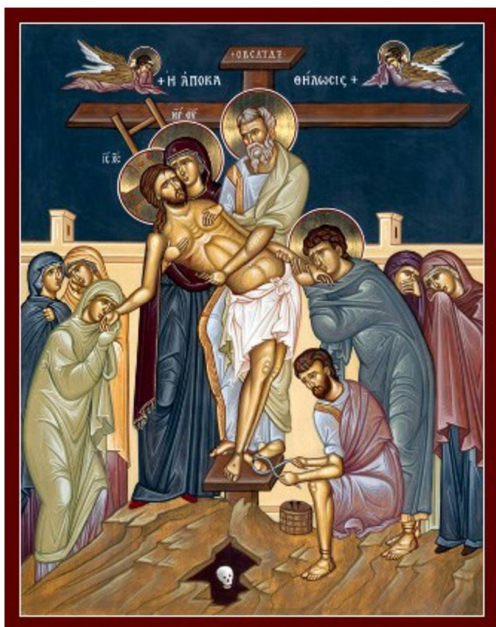
(Prayed daily during Lent, with prostrations)

*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.



"FROM THE CROSS TO THE TOMB"

A Lenten Mini-Retreat for
Young Children
(4-11 years old)

Saturday, February 24

9:00 am - 10:30 am

Divine Liturgy for the Saturday of the Souls

10:30 am - 11:00 am

Light snack in Kokkos Hall. Outdoor play time.

11:00 am - 1:00 pm

Mini-Retreat Sessions and Confession

Orthodox Bookstore

This month we are featuring *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by Saint John Climacos, whom we commemorate on the Fourth Sunday in Lent. This book is an excellent read during Lent, as it helps us deeply examine our thoughts and behaviors – in fact, *The Ladder* is read daily in Orthodox Monasteries during this holy season. Saint John Climacos was an experienced spiritual struggler who understood the depths and intricacies of the human condition.

From Step 8: On Placidity and Meekness:

As the gradual pouring of water on a fire puts out the flame completely, so the tears of genuine mourning can extinguish every flame of anger and irascibility. Hence this comes next in our sequence.

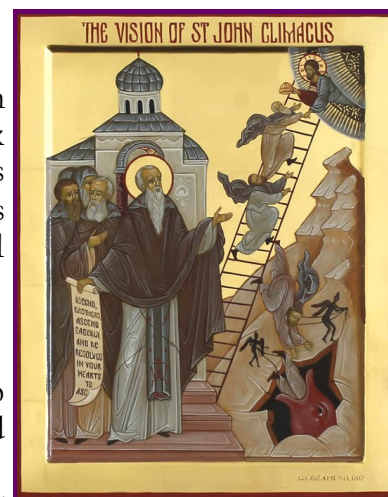
Freedom from anger is an endless wish for dishonor, whereas among the vainglorious there is limitless thirst for praise. Freedom from anger is a triumph over one's nature. It is the ability to be impervious to insults, and comes by hard work and the sweat of one's brow.

Meekness is a permanent condition of that soul which remains unaffected by whether or not it is spoken well of, whether or not it is honored or praised.

The first step toward freedom from anger is to keep the lips silent when the heart is stirred; the next, to keep thoughts silent when the soul is upset; the last, to be totally calm when unclean winds are blowing.

Anger is an indication of concealed hatred, of grievance nursed. Anger is the wish to harm someone who has provoked you.

Until next month, God willing, ICXC NIKΑ, Constantine Frangakis, Bookstore Director



Community Vasilopita ~ January 7, 2018



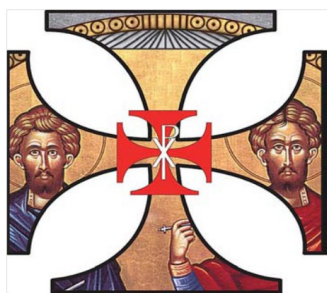
Many thanks to Dora Hart and Panagiota Lieblen for baking the beautiful and delicious Vasilopites for our Parish. The first loaf was auctioned to Cheryl Pandelis, who donated \$150 to the Priest's Discretionary Fund, which assists those in need.

Two loaves were cut in the Church and distributed to Ministries:

The coin was received by Eileen Koutsulis, on behalf of Church School,
and Nicholas Katopodis, on behalf of the Youth Choir.

The third loaf was cut and distributed to all present: Janet Paul received the final coin.
Donations amounted to \$1,200, benefiting St. Basil's Academy for Children.

The Ladies Philoptochos Society *Panagia Chapter ~ St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church* **Honors and Welcomes All New Members**



As Greek Orthodox Christian Women
we are given the great privilege and utmost responsibility
to be the arms of Christ in the world today,
and embrace all those in need.

Please join us and become a
“Friend of the Poor”

Please contact the Membership Committee at lasvegasphiloptochosstjohn@gmail.com

*“Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them for what they have done.”
(Proverbs 19:17)*

2017 Stewardship Report (as of 12/31/17)

Stewardship Gifts Pledged: \$392,087 (\$400,948 total in 2016)
 Stewardship Gifts Received: \$373,050
 Unfulfilled Pledge Balance: \$19,037
 Stewardship Families Pledged: 440 (443 total in 2016)
 Average Pledge to Date: \$891 (\$905 in 2016)

***"I can do all things in Christ Who strengthens me."
 (Philippians 4:13)***

***Please join us in becoming stronger in our Faith,
 stronger as a Community,
 and stronger in Stewardship in 2018.***

Church Account Summaries - December 2017

Nevada State Bank Accounts	November	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	December	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
General Operating Account (GOA)	\$286.79	\$47,287.13	\$48,546.10	\$25,151.71	\$46,341.10	\$24,627.21	
Community and Education (C&E)	\$2,251.51	\$9,867.75		\$1,144.67	\$2,012.00	\$8,962.59	
Greek Food Festival (GFF)	\$89,204.23	\$1,570.00		\$2,106.51	\$15,000.00	\$73,667.72	
Designated, Restricted & Other (DR&O)	\$301,110.63	\$11,410.00		\$9,911.34	\$1,179.11	\$301,430.18	
Folk Dance Group	\$13,465.65	\$1,520.00		\$1,620.00		\$13,365.65	
Mortgage Account	\$52,136.94				\$5,201.14	\$46,935.80	
Designated Funds	November	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	December	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Bookstore	\$8,699.54			\$1,173.84		\$7,525.70	
Ornaments	\$1,077.41					\$1,077.41	
Restricted Funds	November	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	December	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
ICON	\$273,370.46	\$1,410.00		\$1,237.50		\$273,542.96	Iconography, 501c3 Attorney Fees
Library Account	\$1,470.77					\$1,470.77	Account owed \$21,000. Funds used to make payroll and pay bills in 2015
Giving Tree	\$4,450.91					\$4,450.91	
Building Fund	\$7,710.61	\$10,000.00		\$7,500.00	\$1,179.11	\$9,031.50	Preferred Concrete Contracting, Visa 2502
Youth Choir	\$3,069.82					\$3,069.82	
Church School	\$1,306.37					\$1,306.37	
Misc. D & R Deductions	-\$535.26					-\$535.26	
Altar Servers	\$440.00					\$440.00	
GOYA	\$50.00					\$50.00	
Designated, Restricted, and Other Total	\$301,110.63	\$11,410.00	\$0.00	\$9,911.34	\$1,179.11	\$301,430.18	
Other Funds	November	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	December	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Kokkos Scholarship Fund	\$55,859.07		\$2,310.77			\$58,169.84	Change in Value of Investments



FEBRUARY 2018 ~ IN THE YEAR OF THE LORD

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

					1		2 Meeting of Our Lord in the Temple 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy	3
4 8:45 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy 12:15 pm Youth Choir Practice in 4th/5th Class 1:30 pm Young Adults at Super Bowl Party at Koutsulis' House	5 7:00 pm Adult Basketball	6 5:00 pm Greek Language Classes 6:00 pm Philoptochos General Meeting in Kokkos Hall	7 7:00 pm Adult Study	8		9	10 Saturday of Souls 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial 5:00 pm Kali Parea at Penny Latelle's Home	
11 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy <i>Youth Choir Chants</i>	12 11:30 am Forerunners Luncheon in Panos Hall 7:00 pm Adult Basketball	13 5:00 pm Greek Language Classes	14 7:00 pm Adult Study	15		16	17 Saturday of Souls 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial	
18 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy 4:30 pm GOYA Dinner and Discussion 6:00 pm Forgiveness Vespers	19 Lent Begins 6:30 pm Great Compline	20 5:00 pm Greek Language Classes	21 6:30 pm Presanctified Liturgy 8:00 pm Adult Study	22		23 6:00 pm Adult Choir Practice in Choir Loft 6:15 pm Youth Choir Practice in 4th/5th Class 7:00 pm 1st Salutations to the Theotokos	24 Saturday of Souls 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial 9:00 am OFF Mini Lenten Retreat 6:00 pm M&M's at Beeman Home	
25 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy 5:00 pm Pan-Orthodox Vespers at St. Paul	26 6:30 pm Great Compline 7:30 pm Adult Basketball	27 5:00 pm Greek Language Classes 6:00 pm Parish Council Meeting in Library	28 6:30 pm Presanctified Liturgy 8:00 pm Adult Study					

The Desert Messenger

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

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THE DESERT MESSENGER

The Way of the Lord

*Open to me the gates of repentance,
O Giver of Life, for early in the morning
my spirit hastens to Your holy temple,
bringing the temple of
my body all defiled.
But as One compassionate,
cleanse me, I pray,
by Your loving-kindness and mercy.
(Idiomelon, from the Triodion,
Translated by AGES Initiatives)*

Lent begins Monday, February 19

