

# The Desert



# Messenger

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

Volume 18, Issue 4 St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Las Vegas, NV

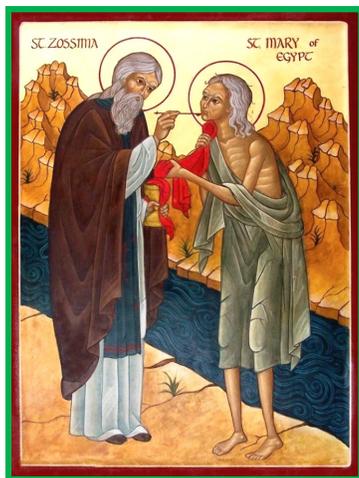
April 2020

From  
Father  
John

Beloved in Christ:

I pray that each and every one of you, my cherished brothers and sisters in the Faith, are well – and I especially lift up in prayer before our God of the Powers the names of all who are suffering directly and indirectly from COVID 19, that He may be with us!

The Lenten monastic custom in 6<sup>th</sup> Century Palestine was for the monks to gather for the Divine Liturgy on Forgiveness Sunday – which leads into the 40 day Fast – receive the Life-Giving Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, partake of a little food in the refectory, return to the Church to make prostrations and embrace one another and ask for forgiveness, and then cross east of the Jordan River into the wilderness for the entire period of Great Lent. Only one or two brothers were left in the monastery so that the Divine Services would continue, while the rest of the monks brought with them a limited amount of basic dry Lenten foods to sustain their bodies: From that point on, as recorded by St. Sophronios of Jerusalem, they all scattered far and wide in different locations, living alone and always singing to God, and return to the monastery on Palm Sunday, so that they could celebrate as a community the Passion and Resurrection of Christ.



As many times as I have read St. Sophronios' *Life of St. Mary of Egypt* which begins with the description above of this monastic custom, these words and this practice have so much more relevance and, admittedly, poignancy during this year's Lenten Season: The major difference, however, is that most of us are practicing social distancing and sheltering in place not for any spiritual or ascetic reason – but because our civil and ecclesiastical authorities have mandated us to do so in an effort to flatten the curve of the pandemic COVID 19. Although the Palestinian monks made every effort out of obedience to avoid one another – “neither to talk to one another, nor to know how each one lived and fasted” – we in contrast have been directed by our hierarchs to stay connected while socially distanced through the live-streaming of our Sunday Divine Liturgy and weekday Lenten Services. Of course, we still have our phones, social media, emails, Zoom conferences and televisions (and countless other mediums) – additionally we have the convenience of getting into our automobiles to run to the grocery store to replenish our food pantries at home: Although we have been forced into what feels like the wilderness of sheltering in place for a yet to be determined amount of time, spiritual asceticism admittedly remains challenging for us because of all the distractions we have so readily available to us. It would be prudent for us to remember that it was in physical isolation that the Elder Zosimas encountered and eventually ministered to a holy woman, the repentant harlot whom we Orthodox Christians venerate as St. Mary of Egypt (commemorated on April 1, and the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent): Rather than being stressed about our self-quarantine, we should use this as a time of genuine fasting, deep prayer and selfless charity so that we too might personally encounter holiness.



(Continued on Page 3)

## WORSHIP SCHEDULE

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

*All our Divine Services are Available on Live-Stream!*

*Access the Live-Stream through our Website: [www.vegasgreekorthodox.com](http://www.vegasgreekorthodox.com)*

*Or Subscribe to our YouTube Channel: [vegasgreekorthodox](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCv8q8q8q8q8q8q8q8q8q8q8)*

Wednesday, April 1

*6:00 pm Presanctified Liturgy*

Friday, April 3

*6:30 pm Akathist Hymn to the Theotokos*

Sunday, April 5/5th Sunday of Lent/

*St. Mary of Egypt*

Orthros: Tone One

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

Epistle: Hebrews 9:11-14

Gospel: John 20:19-31

Monday, April 6

*6:00 pm Great Compline*

Wednesday, April 8

*6:00 pm Presanctified Liturgy*

Saturday, April 11/Saturday of Lazaros

*8:00 am Orthros*

*9:00 am Divine Liturgy*

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

Gospel: John 11:1-45

*5:00 pm Great Vespers of Palm Sunday*

Sunday, April 12/Palm Sunday

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

Epistle: Philippians 4:4-9

Gospel: John 12:1-18

*Blessing of Palms*

### GREAT AND HOLY WEEK

Sunday Evening, April 12

*7:00 pm 1st Bridegroom Service*

Holy Monday, April 13

*7:00 pm 2nd Bridegroom Service*

Holy Tuesday, April 14

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

Holy Wednesday, April 15

*9:00 am Presanctified Liturgy*

*7:00 pm Sacrament of Holy Unction*

Holy Thursday, April 16

*9:00 am Vesperal Liturgy of St. Basil*

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

Holy Friday, April 17

*10:00 am Royal Hours*

*3:00 pm Removal of Christ from the Cross*

*7:00 pm Lamentations*

Holy Saturday, April 18

*9:00 am Vesperal Liturgy of St. Basil*

*11:00 pm Vigil of the Resurrection*

Sunday, April 19/GREAT AND HOLY PASCHA

*12:00 am Resurrectional Orthros and Divine Liturgy*

Resurrection Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

Epistle: Acts 1:1-8

Gospel: John 1:1-17

*Blessing of Red Eggs*

*12:00 pm Agape Vespers*

Gospel (in various languages): John 20:19-25

Thursday, April 23/St. George the Great Martyr

*8:00 am Orthros*

*9:00 am Divine Liturgy*

Epistle: Acts 12:1-11

Gospel: John 1:18-28

Friday, April 24/Our Most Holy Lady Theotokos, the Life-Giving Spring

*8:00 am Orthros*

*9:00 am Divine Liturgy*

Epistle: Acts 3:1-8

Gospel: John 2:12-22

Sunday, April 26/Sunday after Paschal

*Holy Apostle Thomas*

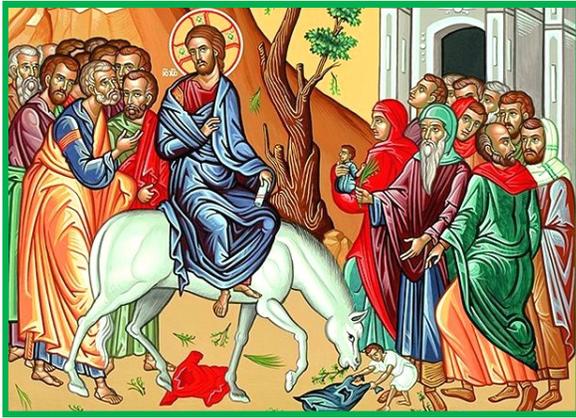
Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): Matthew 28:16-20

Epistle: Acts 5:12-20

Gospel: John 20:19-31

**ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ! CHRIST IS RISEN!**

*From Father John (Continued from Page 1)*



Like the Palestinian monks of old, I am sure all of us are eager to return to Church for Palm Sunday (April 12) and to personally hear the powerful Vespereal hymn on the evening before: “Today the grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us together, and we all take up Your Cross and say: ‘Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!’” However, and sadly so, the number of COVID 19 cases is rising every day in the US and, based on the latest extended shutdown by President Trump, it is looking like we will remain in the wilderness of our home shelters for Great and Holy Week and Pascha: This is the spiritual apex of the entire year, when even the most nominal of Orthodox Christians

flock to the Church for the Divine Services to receive the Sacraments of Holy Unction and Holy Communion, to witness our Lord Crucified, to process with the Ephetaphion, the Lord’s Tomb, and to receive the Holy Paschal Light at the Resurrection Service. As a priest, I cannot even begin to fathom the prospect of celebrating the holiest of all weeks without the presence of all of you! But then again, let us consider the wise words of Elder Zacharias: “If we shall not have Easter in the Church, let us remember that every contact with Christ is Easter. We receive grace in the Divine Liturgy because the Lord Jesus is present in it, He performs the Sacrament and He is the One imparted to the faithful. However, when we invoke His Name, we enter the same Presence of Christ and receive the same grace. Therefore, if we are deprived of the Liturgy, we always have His Name, we are not deprived of the Lord. Moreover, we also have His word, especially His Gospel. If His word dwells continually in our heart, if we study it and pray it, if it becomes our language with which we speak to God as He spoke to us, then we shall have again the grace of the Lord. For His words are words of eternal life (*John 6:68*), and the same mystery is performed, we receive His grace and are sanctified.”

For now, let us pray for Christ the True Physician of our souls and bodies, to grant healing for those afflicted with COVID 19, eternal repose for those who have succumbed to the virus, and protection for our physicians and nurses and all those who are on the front line of battling this virus: Moreover, may our Crucified and Resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus Christ comfort and grant His abiding grace to each of us who are suffering “for a little while.” This too shall pass: We must always remember that God is with us! Please be safe, healthy, faithful and prayerful.

**Καλη Ανασταση** – Blessed Resurrection! With much love in Christ,

*Father John*



*JD Rosenthal  
COVID 19  
ER Nurse*



*Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian*



*Lord and Master of my life, cast away from me the spirit of laziness,  
idle curiosity, love of power and vain talk.*

*But grant me, Your servant, the spirit of moderation, humility, patience and love.*

*Yes, Lord and King, grant me to see my own faults and  
not to judge my brothers and sisters. For You are blessed forever. Amen.*

## Parish Council Report

As I write this month's column, I do so with a heavy heart knowing that our great nation and community are facing a horrible and invisible threat from COVID 19, which is dominating every single aspect of our lives. Without question, it is extremely daunting to wrap our minds around what is happening when it can seem to so many that our world is crumbling around us. It is at times like this that Faith in God and Prayer become paramount. It is through Faith and Prayer, and by following the measures prescribed by our President, our Governor, the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the many other related government and private agencies, that we will eventually defeat this unseen enemy.

Faith and Prayer during these difficult times can sometimes seem impossible, but it is really the key to victory. It is when life becomes difficult that we are able to rise above the difficulties through Faith and Prayer. So please stay Faithful and Pray for those afflicted with this dreaded disease, for our medical personnel who are on the front lines fighting it, for our first responders, for those in the laboratories working on treatments and cures, for those who are working to provide much needed resources such as medical equipment and supplies, for our leaders to learn from mistakes and continue making the right decisions, for strength and toughness to endure these strange and challenging times, and most of all, for a speedy victory and end to this dreaded disease. Faith and Prayer can produce an enormous amount of power for a greater purpose, and the more Faith we put in God, the better we will defeat this invisible enemy. To coin a familiar phrase, when times are tough, we must get tougher, and through Faith and Prayer we will have the toughness to obtain victory and overcome this trying state of affairs.

I would like to share a favorite poem of mine about Faith – “Footprints in the Sand” – which seems very appropriate for these arduous times:

One night I dreamed a dream.  
As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.  
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.  
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,  
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.

After the last scene of my life flashed before me,  
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.  
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,  
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,  
there was only one set of footprints.

This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.  
“Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,  
You'd walk with me all the way.  
But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life,  
there was only one set of footprints.  
I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave me.”

He whispered, “My precious child, I love you and will never leave you  
Never, ever, during your trials and testings.  
When you saw only one set of footprints,  
It was then that I carried you.”

In light of the current situation, there are a lot of questions pertaining to the operation of our Church, and upcoming events. Our Church remains in full operation; however, as you all are aware, we have been complying with the guidelines and mandates for dealing with COVID 19, and are therefore limited to live-streaming all our Services, which we are doing through YouTube. Unfortunately, this will be the norm for at least another month or even more. For information on how to live stream Church Services, please go to our Church website at <https://www.vegaskorthodox.com/> for directions.

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

Please note that all Services normally performed during this Lenten and Paschal period will be performed and available via live-streaming. We thank Bill Bruninga and Dimitri Rodis for making this happen. The quality of our live-streaming is getting much better, thanks to Bill. Also, please note that you can have candles lit by contacting the Church Office and making arrangements. As is the case with everyone, it is our fervent hope that this insidious threat will soon be defeated in the coming weeks or possibly months, and we can again join together in person to worship in our Faith.

As for events such as the Agape Picnic and the Greek Food Festival, and other gatherings, we are taking it day by day. We hope to have an "Agape Picnic" in the near future, once COVID 19 has been defeated, and the guidelines and mandates have been relaxed. Unfortunately, as it now stands, we will not be having the Agape Picnic on Pascha. As to the Greek Festival, we are presently moving forward with the planning; however, we are moving forward with circumspection and prudence. We have set August 1, 2020, as the deadline date for making the final decision on whether to go forward with the Festival. Until we have made the final decision, we are not financially obligating the Church for anything related to the Festival. The final decision will obviously be based upon the economic situation in Las Vegas. To make the final decision, we will be considering such benchmarks as to whether people are occupying Strip and downtown hotels, whether people are going to restaurants, whether other events are doing well, whether sports venues are enjoying capacity crowds, whether the employment situation is doing well, and a host of other indicators. Assuming we are going forward, the biggest impediments will be a shorter amount of time for pre-sales and advertising.

On another note, many people have been and are being adversely impacted by COVID 19. Many in Las Vegas, including many of our Parishioners have lost their jobs and other sources of income, and are suffering hard times. When others suffer like this in our community, so does the Church because it becomes very difficult to meet the Church's financial obligations due to fewer contributions. Thus, if you are able, we urge you to help others in need, and also urge you to contribute to the Church to help us overcome the financial shortfalls we are now going to encounter due to fewer contributions. Please look into your hearts and help.

As stated, we look forward to the time when we can all worship in Church together in person. In the meantime, we urge everyone to be safe, and to comply with the guidelines and mandates for dealing with and defeating COVID 19. We also urge everyone to take care of one another during these taxing times. The more we allow God to direct and guide our lives, the more power and blessings we're going to have. Again, Pray for the strength of our Country and World to defeat this threat. Faith and Prayer will defeat this enemy. We may be experiencing pressure today, but we will not be defeated by it.

God Bless! Gus Flangas, Parish Council President

*From the nightwatch my spirit keeps vigil for You, O God!*

## ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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

Rev. Father John Hondros  
frjohn@vegaskgreekorthodox.com

Rev. Father Seraphim Ramos  
frseraphim@vegaskgreekorthodox.com

Karen Rawlinson  
Administrative Assistant

Michelle Eugenio  
Bookkeeper

Mara Braun  
Catering & Events

Constantin Petriuc & Ramona Tasios  
Maintenance & Grounds

### Office Hours

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

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

Parish Council: Gus Flangas

Philoptochos: Benita Beeman

Stewardship & Community Outreach:  
Justina Szukiewicz

Choir: Athena Mertes

Chanters & Youth Choir:  
Presvytera Maria Hondros

Church School: Eileen Koutsulis

Altar Servers: Father John

### GOYA:

Kouli Pouridis & June Likourinou

Orthodox Family Fellowship:  
Jelena Boskovic & Amy Khuri

Young Adults:  
Nicholas Asim & Melissa Fleetwood

Greek Folk Dance: Sia Dalacas

Greek School: Paula Kelesis

### Mr. & Mrs.:

Fr. John, Fr. Seraphim & Presvyteres

Kali Parea: Demetrious Asim &  
Joy Wolfenbarger

Adult Basketball:  
TBD

Forerunners: Victoria Xikis

Orthodox Bookstore:  
Constantine Frangakis,  
Paisios & Mary Pursell

Greek Food Festival: Gus Flangas

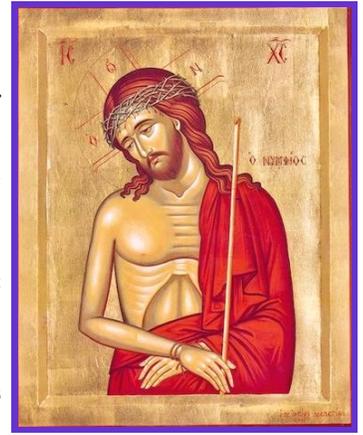
Hellenic Historical Society:  
Nitsa Filios, Cheryl Pandelis &  
Susan Stamis

Photography: Bill Bruninga

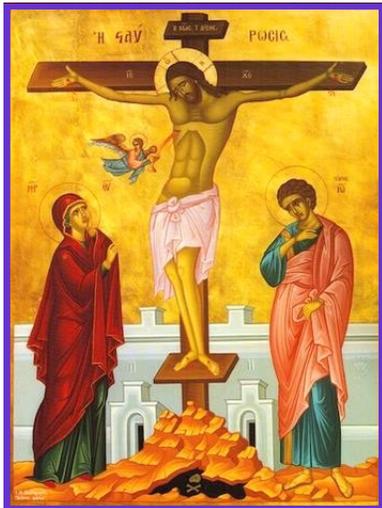
## Great and Holy Week Services

All the Services of Great and Holy Week will be live-streamed for your participation, given the current mandates from our government and ecclesiastical authorities which restrict us from gathering personally in the Church. As we are sheltering in place, due to the pandemic COVID 19, please make every effort to join us in Spirit for each and every service.

Holy Week commences on Palm Sunday Evening – *April 12* – when we will celebrate the Orthros of Holy Monday, known as the Bridegroom (*Nymphios*) Service: For three consecutive nights we have our eyes fixed on the icon of Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church, in the center of the Soleas – although this is an image of our Lord clothed in a scarlet robe, crowned with thorns, hands bound, and holding a reed. The hymns and readings of these services set the stage for our Lord’s Passion, while simultaneously making us mindful of His imminent Second Coming: ***“Behold, the Bridegroom approaches in the middle of the night, and blessed is the one He finds awake and waiting.”***

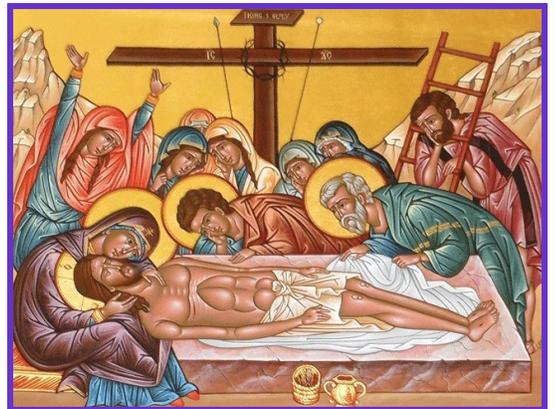


In the Greek Orthodox practice, the Sacrament of Holy Unction is placed mid-week and, as a service of healing, its link to Christ’s Passion is indisputable: We humans are sick – physically, emotionally and spiritually – as a result of Adam and Eve’s Fall and the perpetual sinfulness of each generation.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



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

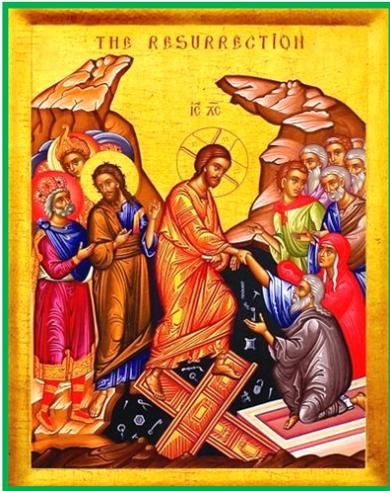
Holy Friday is the most solemn day of the year, Holy Friday, and our Holy Orthodox Church offers throughout the day the most beautiful and spiritually stirring services. At the mid-afternoon service the priest reads the long Gospel passage recounting the Lord’s Crucifixion and Death, and toward the end he pauses to bring the narrative home: He goes before the Cross, prostrates himself and then solemnly removes our Lord, wraps Him in a linen shroud, and places Him in the Altar, which becomes His Tomb. Shortly after, the priest processes the *Epitaphios* (the cloth icon of the Entombed Lord) around the Church and then gently lays Him in the Sepulcher. That night we participate in the Funeral of our Lord Jesus Christ and chant the spiritually rich, much beloved and beautifully melodic Lamentations: ***“In a grave they laid You, O my life and my Christ; and the armies of the angels were quite amazed, as they sang the praise of Your submissive love.”***



That night we participate in the Funeral of our Lord Jesus Christ and chant the spiritually rich, much beloved and beautifully melodic Lamentations: ***“In a grave they laid You, O my life and my Christ; and the armies of the angels were quite amazed, as they sang the praise of Your submissive love.”***

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## Great and Holy Week Services (Continued from Page 6)



The Vesperal Liturgy of Holy Saturday morning is replete with joyful anticipation, especially with the inspired and spirited hymns: Many prophecies from the Old Testament are read, prefiguring Christ's Resurrection on the third day and His power over Death. Just before the reading of the Holy Gospel, the priest sprinkles bay leaves all around the Church – as a symbol of Christ's victory – while chanting triumphantly: *“Arise, O God, and judge the earth, for You shall bring all nations to Your inheritance!”*

Much later that night, we will wait in anticipation to celebrate Great and Holy Pascha, the Feast of all feasts. At midnight the Royal Doors are quickly opened and the priest lights the large Paschal Candle from the solitary flame of the Altar vigil lamp, and then raises it before the faithful – as a visual expression that our Risen Christ has overcome the bonds of Hades and Death – proclaiming in chant, *“Come, receive the light from the Light that is never overtaken by night and glorify Christ, Who is risen from the dead.”*

You are highly encouraged to follow the many services with a Holy Week and Pascha Service Book. If you wish to purchase one, please call the Church Office and Karen will assist you.

With Love in the Crucified and Risen Lord,

*Father John*

## Stewardship and Community Outreach



Whew! This has been a wild couple of weeks, hasn't it? Cancellations, closures, shortages, stoppages. Near constant media reporting of a running tally, country by country and state by state; the dire warnings are coming from all quarters. There is apparently no limit to supply or demand for the latest news about this topic in today's hyper-connected world. Yes, we agree, this novel Coronavirus 19 certainly bears watching, we just do not know enough about it – and it is certainly nothing to be sneezed at, now that its spread has been upgraded to pandemic status. You may rest assured, however, that although our Church doors are currently closed and our participation in the Services is limited to live-streaming from home, one season which has not been canceled is Lent.

The Lord assures us not once, not twice, but something north of 100 times across all of Scripture (the actual number depends on your chosen translation) with words of “fear not”, “be not afraid”, “do not fear”, etc. This is where good stewardship comes in. We must live our Faith. We must learn from the Church and from Scripture. We must pray for discernment and guidance during tough times. Yes, we must practice lovingkindness and patience even in our frenzied shopping outings and endeavor to be the calm in this worldly storm.

Our Church has survived persecutions, plagues, wars, and yes even pandemics, spread across two thousand years of its history. It survived then, as it will now, through the efforts of good stewards who cared deeply about living, sharing, and building up the Christian Faith. Please prayerfully remember St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church during these trying times. This is especially important now that the majority of us are sheltering in place.

For now, the most effective outreach we can do is to call and check in on our fellow Parish members. Stay healthy out there.

Yours in Christ, Mike Beeler, Stewardship and Outreach Committee

## *From Father Seraphim*

“For us American Christians, for most of us, we have a God without wrath, bringing man without sin, into a Kingdom with no judgment, by Christ without a cross.”

- H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (1937)

One of the main tasks I have been given by Father John (in addition to the Youth Ministries) and a large part of my time in the office (and currently via FaceTime or Zoom) is spent meeting with catechumens and instructing them in the Orthodox Faith. I feel incredibly blessed to spend this time with people of so many religious backgrounds – and some with no religious background – and ages: Right now we have former Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, New Age/Spiritualism, Muslim, and Atheists, along with former Protestants and Roman Catholics converting to Orthodox Christianity in our Parish of St. John the Baptist. It is especially pertinent to be having these meetings during the Holy Season of Great Lent, which for 2,000 years has been the time of fasting, prayer, and instruction in preparation for Baptism on Pascha.

Some of my most interesting weekly meetings are with those people who are converting to Orthodoxy in preparation for their upcoming marriage in the Church. I encourage the Orthodox spouses or betrothed’s of these catechumens to also join in for the sessions, which introduce the Orthodox Church’s Faith, History, Worship, Life, Sacraments, Divine Liturgy and Creed. I find that some people who were baptized as infants somehow grew up in the Church without really knowing or putting into practice many of the most basic teachings of our Faith that make up an Orthodox way of life. It is an incredible privilege to speak with people of an Orthodox background about the deep spiritual riches of their own inheritance that were previously unknown to them – or at least not put into practice. I wondered how this situation had come about, with people passing through our Church School, Youth Ministries and Camps in different parishes throughout America without really engaging the depth of our Orthodox Faith and Life.

After looking into latest and best research on this trend, the situation is no longer surprising: “We’ve always been trying to prepare our kids for college (and I still think that’s a critical thing to do, of course), but it turns out that only 11 percent of those who have left the Church did so during the college years. Almost 90% of them were lost in middle school and high school. By the time they got to college they were already gone! About 40 percent are leaving the Church during elementary and middle school years!” (Ken Ham, Britt Beemer and Todd Hillard, *Already Gone – Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop It*) Let’s allow those numbers to sink in for a moment. Forty percent of our kids are mentally checking out of the Church in elementary and middle school. Continuing to look at how early formative experiences typically occur, we know that morals are set by age 9 and most worldviews are established by age 13. (Jen Oshman, *Worldview is formed by age 13: Who’s Shaping Your Kids?*)

These surprising and alarming truths have made me realize that we, as a Greek Orthodox Community in America, need to step up our efforts in the arena of the religious education for our children, youth, young adults, and even continuing adult education. Our culture is no longer neutral toward people of sincere traditional Christian Faith. It is not surprising therefore, that when we send our kids to public educational institutions – where prayer is banned or even criminalized, scientific materialism is taught with no reference to God, and new policies regarding gender, sexuality, and identity are now rigorously enforced – that our kids, without our help and involvement, would not be able to counter such a strong social current. Christians have always been “swimming upstream” against fallen elements within every culture in which they have lived over the past 2,000 years, but we should all realize that one hour in a Sunday morning Church School classroom is not adequate inoculation against the virus of atheism and faithlessness spreading so rampantly in our times.

As we enter the greatest week of the year together – Holy Week – it is important to remember that the very core of Orthodox Christianity is not a faith that is a “philosophy of life.” It is not a teaching in the sense that we have people who gave us teachings to show us the ways to wisdom and knowledge. It is certainly not an ideology. Rather, our whole life and identity as Christians is totally defined, not by a teaching, but by a Person.

*(Continued on Page 9)*

**Philoptochos  
News**

Dearest Sisters of Philoptochos and the St. John Community,

As we go through this uncertain time, let us each be guided by our faith, love and kindness that we have always shown as Philoptochos ladies. This is a time of caution, but also a time for compassion and reaching out to check on one another.

Please take the time to call a sister to see how they are doing and if they have any needs we can assist with. Our elderly and those alone may just need someone to talk to during this isolated time. As we are in the Lenten Fast, let us show love by our outreach and compassion.

With the present circumstances, Philoptochos has no hands-on activities or meetings scheduled. Once our Church doors are open and Services resume, we will notify everyone by email.

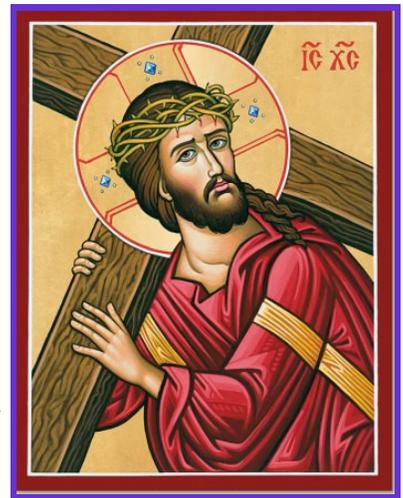
Let us all pray for those fighting the Coronavirus 19 and those who are on the front lines protecting each one of us.

May Christ continue to bless you and your families during the blessed Easter Holiday!

**With Love in Christ, Benita Beeman, Philoptochos President**

*From Father Seraphim (Continued from Page 8)*

That person is Jesus Christ, and the ultimate act of this man, the God-Man, the very revelation of God Himself in the world, was to die on the Cross and provide us access, through His Resurrection and Ascension, to His own Divine and Trinitarian Life. The main way that the Church has provided for us to be united with Christ is through the Sacramental life of the Church. From our infancy we are claimed, washed, sealed and communed as Christians! We continue to receive the Sacraments throughout our lives, from childhood to old age: When we sin and fall, we repent and run to the Sacrament of Holy Confession; when we find someone with whom we will journey together to the Kingdom of God, we are joined in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony; when we fall ill we are anointed with the oil of healing in the Sacrament of Holy Unction.



Part of taking up our Cross as Christians today and following after our Crucified and Risen Lord in the period of self-quarantine and the inability to participate physically in the Divine Liturgy (apart from live-streaming) means that we need to stay connected to Christ and His Church through other ways as well. We can read spiritual books as a family, study our Faith together, pray with our kids during the Divine Liturgy through the online text provided by the Archdiocese, teach our Children by our own Orthodox way of life, and help them to form an Orthodox worldview. We can no longer expect someone else to make our families holy. Now more than ever, it is time to repent and rededicate ourselves to the Sacramental and Spiritual life our Church offers as our primary and fundamental devotion: In this way we will help change those terrible statistics, and both our lives and those of our children will be transformed and saved from the wickedness and perverseness of our generation.

With Love in Christ,

*Father Seraphim*

**LIGHTING A CANDLE FOR YOU**

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

## Ministry News

### Church School

**WATCH THE LIVE-STREAM SERVICES AS A FAMILY:** All the Sunday Divine Liturgies, Weekday Lenten Services and Holy Week Services are available via live-streaming on the Church's YouTube Channel. There are other suggestions for keeping our Faith alive while we are sheltered in place (see Page 11).

**MISSIONS POSSIBLE:** Throughout Lent, Church School requests your offering for Missions Possible, which benefits Mission Parishes in the Metropolis of San Francisco. You can mail in your offering to the Church; please earmark for Missions Possible.

Kalo Pascha and Kali Anastasi! Have a Blessed Holy Week and Pascha!

Love in Christ, Eileen Koutsulis, Church School Director (702) 521-6516 or [vivaleenie@cox.net](mailto:vivaleenie@cox.net)



### Forerunners - The Seniors of St. John the Baptist

**KALO PASCHA! KALI ANASTASI!**

We ask that all of you be careful during these times and as seniors to be diligent in playing it safe and staying home. If you have internet services in your home, you are encouraged to watch our live-streamed Church Services from our very own Parish. You can access our live-stream through our Parish website <https://www.vegasgreekorthodox.com/> or by subscribing to our YouTube Channel, [vegasgreekorthodox](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCv8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8). Should you need further instructions, please check with someone within your family who may be able to give you a helping hand.

As always, and especially now, our prayers love and thoughts go out to all our Seniors!

With Love in Christ, Victoria Xikis for the Senior Forerunners

*Due to the Pandemic COVID 19 . . .*

*All Parish Ministries and Hellenic Organizations and Parish Events  
are canceled until further notice.*

*Please stay safe, healthy, faithful and prayerful,*

*and remember:*

***GOD IS WITH US!***



## Things You Can Do At Home to Stay Connected to God

**Read the Bible!** *Lent is especially a time of reading the Old Testament as we prepare for Holy Week and Pascha.*

**Pray!** *Many times we say, “We are too busy to pray.” Well, now we are all stuck at home! Light your incense, light your candles, and spend time in your icon corner!*

**Say the Jesus Prayer!** *Even if you do not have a prayer rope, you can still find some time to quietly say, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”*

**Read the Lives of the Saints or a Spiritual Book!**

**Stream Our Church Services Online!** *Liturgical Texts are available on [www.goarch.org](http://www.goarch.org) under “Chapel.” Holy Week Books can be purchased through the Church Office.*

**Go for a Walk and Marvel at the Beauty of God’s Creation!** *David tells us in the Psalms that, “The Heavens declare the Glory of God.” Many times in our busy lives we forget to take the time to gaze upon the majesty of God’s handiwork.*

**Keep the Fast!** *Just because we are not going to school or work for the time being, does not mean we forget the journey to Pascha. Stay strong and keep fasting!*

**Practice Almsgiving!** *Now is the time that many people will be suffering, whether they lost a job or fear going outside. The Seniors of our community could really use a call, groceries, or an encouraging word during this difficult time.*

## KOKKOS SCHOLARSHIP

The Scholarship Committee for the Kokkos Scholarship Fund is pleased to announce that applications *are still available at the Church Office*. Please call Karen during weekday office hours, from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, and she will email you an application via email; you can also contact her at [karen@vegasgreekorthodox.com](mailto:karen@vegasgreekorthodox.com). The applications must be returned *on or before Friday, April 24*. Late and/or incomplete applications will not be considered.

The eligibility requirements were established by Fofa Kokkos in her Last Will and Testament. The Scholarship Committee for the Kokkos Scholarship Fund administers this program under the guidance of Father John Hondros. The Kokkos Will stipulates that two high school graduates of Greek descent within the St. John Community be selected, who are enrolled for higher education to a college or university.

Two scholarships will be given, and the amounts this year are \$1,500 each. The students must have an outstanding scholastic record and be in financial need. Also, Parish involvement by the students at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church was important to Fofa Kokkos; therefore, this is also a factor in evaluating the applicants.

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



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

Raphael (Nabi), son of Daniel Ghebream and Selam Ghermay, on February 22, 2020.  
Godparent: Efrem Gebreamlak.

Anna, daughter of Brian and Mary Shive, on February 23, 2020.  
Godparent: Despina Shive.

Joseph, son of Richard Tackley and Stephanie Manteris, on March 1, 2020.  
Godparent: James Manteris.

Paraskevi (Vivian) Brennan (Adult Baptism), daughter of Peter and Maria Brennan, on March 15, 2020. Godparent: Efthimia Eliades Lekar.

Catherine, daughter of Peter and Maria Brennan, on March 15, 2020.  
Godparent: Katerina Ruffner.

Stavroula (Stephanie), daughter of Peter and Maria Brennan, on March 15, 2020.  
Godparent: Athanasia Stefanatos.

### *Chrismations*

Justin (Joshua) Britton on March 8, 2020.  
Sponsor: Rahel Kiflezgi.

Maria Brennan on March 15, 2020.  
Sponsor: Efthimia Eliades Lekar.

### *Fallen Asleep in the Lord: Eternal Memory!*

Vasiliki Karas on March 4, 2020. Funeral on March 9.

Chloe Nickolson Christian on March 19, 2020. Funeral in Chicago, IL.

## Orthodox Bookstore

Kalo Pascha! Greetings from the Bookstore!

Last month, we featured *The Spiritual Life and How to Attain It* by St. Theophan the Recluse. This month, we are featuring another book from this great 19th Century Saint, *The Path to Salvation: A Concise Outline of Christian Asceticism*. This book is called the Saint's "crowning achievement".

Saint Theophan expresses that the path to salvation is as follows: "It is possible to describe the feelings and inclinations which a Christian must have, but this is very far from being all that is demanded for the ordering of one's salvation. The important thing for us is a real life in the spirit of Christ. But just touch on this, and how many perplexities are uncovered, how many guideposts are necessary, as a result, almost at every step!"

"True, one may know man's final goal: Communion with God. And one may describe the path to it: Faith, and walking in the commandments, with the aid of divine grace. One need only say in addition: Here is the path – start walking!"

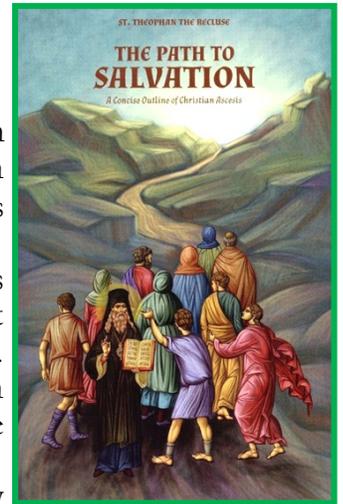
The Path to Salvation is clearly presented in a step by step manner. The Saint guides the reader down the path away from sin through purification and toward salvation. He explains how the Christian life begins in us, how it is perfected, ripened and strengthened, and how it manifests itself in its perfection.

More from St. Theophan: "The principal thing is to walk before God, or under God's eye, aware that God is looking at you, searching your soul and your heart, seeing all that is there. This awareness is the most powerful lever in the mechanism of the inner spiritual life."

"The most important condition is faith that God is near and hears us. Say the prayer into God's ear."

*Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!*

Until next month, God willing, Mary Pursell and the Bookstore Team





### Family Wellness Ministry CHALLENGE

## Reclaiming The Family Dinner

One Meal At A Time



"Face-to-Face ~ Heart-to-Heart"

Pray Together  
before Meals



Keep the Table  
Tech Free



Heart-to-Heart  
Conversations



www.familywellnessministry.org





"Lift up your heads,  
O gates! And be exalted,  
you everlasting doors,  
that the King of Glory  
may enter in!"  
(Psalm 24: 7)



*Making amends for her sins,  
she washes the Creator's Feet with tears  
and dries them with her hair.  
Hence the remission of all she had committed in life,  
and her cry: "All the works of the Lord,  
praise the Lord and exalt Him forever!"  
(Canon, 8th Ode, Holy Tuesday Evening)*

**2020 Stewardship  
Report  
(as of 3/31/20)**

Stewardship Gifts Pledged: \$363,555 (\$387,553 in 2019)  
Stewardship Gifts Received: \$186,111 (\$157,074 in 2019)  
Unfulfilled Pledge Balance: \$177,444 (\$230,479 in 2019)  
Stewardship Families Pledged: 311 (310 in 2019)  
Average Pledge to Date: \$1,169 (\$1,242 in 2019)  
Average Pledge Needed: \$3,200 (311 Families)

**Church Account Summaries - February 2020**

| Nevada State Bank Accounts                     | January               | Deposits          | Transfers In      | Withdraws/<br>Checks | Transfers Out  | February              | Notes                                  |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--|
|  | Ending Balance        |                   |                   |                      |                | Ending Balance        |  |
| General Operating Account (GOA)                | \$63,405.46           | \$59,867.92       | \$40.59           | \$11,237.49          | \$50,820.38    | \$61,256.10           |  |
| Community and Education (C&E)                  | \$5,020.10            | \$3,015.58        |                   | \$1,000.00           | \$4,000.00     | \$3,035.68            | Transfer to Festival account for bills |
| Greek Food Festival (GFF)                      | \$253.69              | \$537.80          | \$4,175.00        | \$3,463.10           | \$17.29        | \$1,486.10            |  |
| Designated, Restricted & Other (DR&O)          | \$281,443.38          | \$2,787.00        | \$4,300.00        | \$7,957.84           | \$88.80        | \$280,483.74          |  |
| Folk Dance Group                               | \$18,152.69           | \$4,525.00        | \$415.00          | \$5,340.43           | \$38.30        | \$17,713.96           |  |
| Hellenic Historical Society                    | \$3,300.94            |                   |                   |                      |                | \$3,300.94            |  |
| <b>Designated Funds</b>                        | <b>January</b>        |                   |                   |                      |                | <b>February</b>       |  |
|  | <b>Ending Balance</b> |                   |                   |                      |                | <b>Ending Balance</b> |  |
| Bookstore                                      | \$5,946.41            | \$2,408.00        | \$300.00          | \$857.30             | \$88.80        | \$7,708.31            |  |
| Ornaments                                      | \$1,169.41            |                   |                   |                      |                | \$1,169.41            |  |
| <b>Restricted Funds</b>                        | <b>January</b>        |                   |                   |                      |                | <b>February</b>       |  |
|  | <b>Ending Balance</b> |                   |                   |                      |                | <b>Ending Balance</b> |  |
| ICON   | \$139,582.76          | \$125.00          |                   |                      |                | \$139,707.76          |  |
| Library Account                                | \$1,470.77            |                   |                   |                      |                | \$1,470.77            |  |
| Miscellaneous                                  | \$0.00                |                   |                   |                      |                | \$0.00                |  |
| Giving Tree                                    | \$0.91                |                   |                   |                      |                | \$0.91                |  |
| Line of Credit Reserve                         | \$4,000.00            |                   | \$4,000.00        |                      |                | \$8,000.00            |  |
| Building Fund                                  | \$24,019.26           |                   |                   |                      |                | \$24,019.26           |  |
| 60th Anniversary Funds                         | \$7,100.54            |                   |                   | \$7,100.54           |                | \$0.00                |  |
| Youth Choir                                    | \$2,989.18            |                   |                   |                      |                | \$2,989.18            |  |
| Church School                                  | \$1,306.37            |                   |                   |                      |                | \$1,306.37            |  |
| Three Priests                                  | \$42,683.49           |                   |                   |                      |                | \$42,683.49           |  |
| Roof Appeal                                    | \$50,522.68           | \$254.00          |                   |                      |                | \$50,776.68           |  |
| Baptismal Water Heater                         | \$69.24               |                   |                   |                      |                | \$69.24               |  |
| Altar Servers                                  | \$440.00              |                   |                   |                      |                | \$440.00              |  |
| GOYA   | \$142.36              |                   |                   |                      |                | \$142.36              |  |
| <b>Designated, Restricted, and Other Total</b> | <b>\$281,443.38</b>   | <b>\$2,787.00</b> | <b>\$4,300.00</b> | <b>\$7,957.84</b>    | <b>\$88.80</b> | <b>\$280,483.74</b>   |  |
| <b>Other Funds</b>                             | <b>January</b>        |                   |                   |                      |                | <b>February</b>       |  |
|  | <b>Ending Balance</b> |                   |                   |                      |                | <b>Ending Balance</b> |  |
| Kokkos Scholarship Fund                        | \$70,650.45           |                   |                   | \$1,500.00           |                | \$69,150.45           |  |

**February 2020 Candles** \$5,214.00  
**February 2020 Trays** \$3,868.00  
**Total February Candles & Trays** \$9,082.00



APRIL 2020 ~ IN THE YEAR OF THE LORD



Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

|  |   |   |   |  |   |   |          |
|--|---|---|---|--|---|---|----------|
|  |   |   |   | <b>1</b><br>6:00 pm Presanctified Liturgy  | <b>2</b>  | <b>3</b><br>6:30 pm The Akathist Hymn   | <b>4</b> |
| <b>5</b><br>8:45 am Orthros<br>10:00 am Divine Liturgy   | <b>6</b><br>6:00 pm Great Compline                      | <b>7</b><br>6:00 pm Parish Council Zoom Conference                                  | <b>8</b><br>6:00 pm Presanctified Liturgy   | <b>9</b>   | <b>10</b>   | <b>11 Saturday of Lazaros</b><br>8:00 am Orthros<br>9:00 am Divine Liturgy<br>5:00 pm Great Vespers |          |
| <b>12 Palm Sunday</b><br>8:45 am Orthros<br>10:00 am Divine Liturgy<br>7:00 pm 1st Bridegroom Service                              | <b>13 Holy Monday</b><br>7:00 pm 2nd Bridegroom Service | <b>14 Holy Tuesday</b><br>7:00 pm 3rd Bridegroom Service<br><i>Hymn of Kassiani</i> | <b>15 Holy Wednesday</b><br>9:00 am Presanctified Liturgy<br>7:00 pm Holy Unction | <b>16 Holy Thursday</b><br>9:00 am Vespers<br>Liturgy of St. Basil<br>7:00 pm Holy Passion of Our Lord<br><i>Reading of 12 Gospels</i> | <b>17 Holy Friday</b><br>10:00 am Royal Hours<br>3:00 pm Removal of Christ from the Cross<br>7:00 pm Lamentations                                     | <b>18 Holy Saturday</b><br>9:00 am Vespers Liturgy of St. Basil<br>11:00 pm Resurrection Vigil      |          |
| <b>19 Holy Pascha</b><br>12:00 am Resurrection Orthros and Divine Liturgy<br><i>Blessing of Red Eggs</i><br>12:00 pm Agape Vespers | <b>20</b>   | <b>21</b>   | <b>22</b>   | <b>23 St. George, the Great Martyr</b><br>8:00 am Orthros<br>9:00 am Divine Liturgy  | <b>24 Theotokos, the Life-Giving Spring</b><br>8:00 am Orthros<br>9:00 am Divine Liturgy<br><b>Last Day to Return Kokkos Scholarship Applications</b> | <b>25</b>   |          |
| <b>26 St. Thomas Sunday</b><br>8:45 am Orthros<br>10:00 am Divine Liturgy  | <b>27</b>   | <b>28</b>   | <b>29</b>   | <b>Bright Week ~ No Fasting All Week! Christ is Risen!</b>   |   | <b>30</b>   |          |

# *The Desert Messenger*

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

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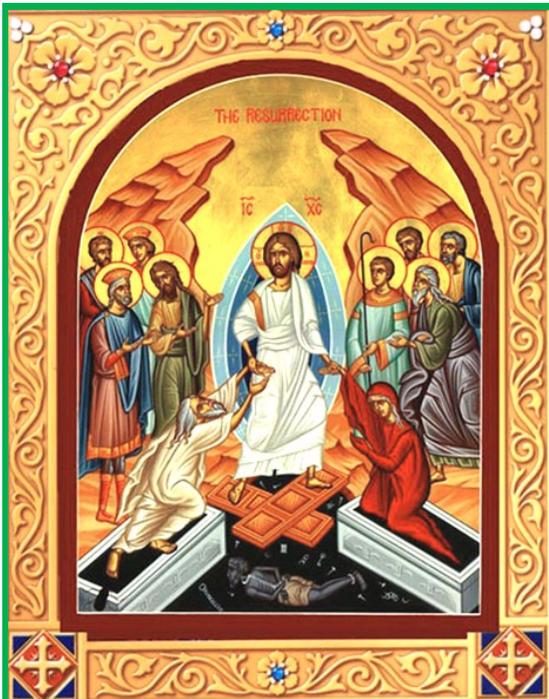
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POSTMASTER : DATED MATERIAL - PLEASE EXPEDITE

THE DESERT MESSENGER

## *The Way of the Lord*



*Let God arise and His enemies be scattered,  
and let those who hate Him flee from His Presence.*

*As smoke vanishes, let them vanish,  
as wax melts in the presence of the fire.*

*So let the sinners perish from God's Presence,  
and let the just rejoice.*

*This is the day the Lord has made:*

*Let us exult and rejoice in it.*

*(Psalms 68:1-2; 118:24 - as chanted in the Resurrection Service)*

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