

# The Desert



# Messenger

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

*Volume 19, Issue 5 St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Las Vegas, NV*

*May 2021*

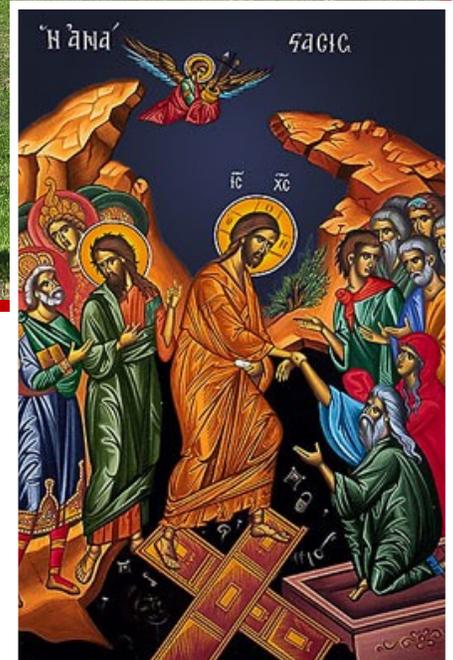
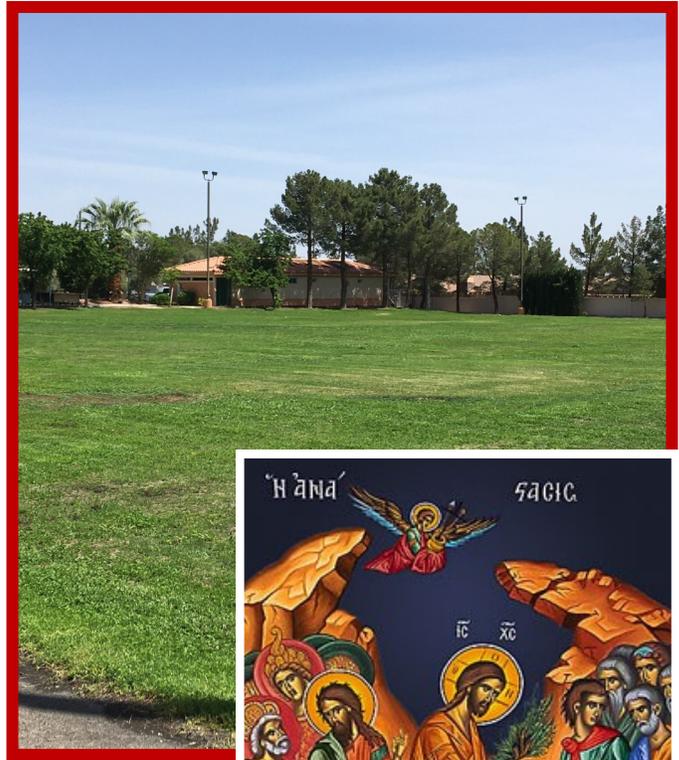
**From  
Father  
John**

Beloved in Christ:

Over a year ago the decision was made to stop watering our grassy Church field. Because of the COVID pandemic our Church services were closed to the public – available only through live-stream – and with that, we anticipated our revenue would be down during the busiest time of the liturgical year. When it came to cutting expenses, our Church leadership agreed that the expansive lawn was the obvious sacrifice, as there would be no Agape Picnic, no ministries, no Greek Food Festival and, essentially, no valid reason to pay a huge monthly water bill for something that would not be utilized.

The grass on the huge field, once a large expanse of green that could even be enjoyed from a jet window on its ascent from McCarran Airport, quickly turned into an unsightly mass of dead brown with an abundance of weeds. This was not only a reflection of our frugality in the face of a deathly pandemic and its devastating financial implications, but moreover an icon of what had occurred in our Church worldwide due to the restrictions that kept our faithful from worshiping in person during the holiest season of the year. One year later, by the grace of God, the restrictions have been exponentially lifted – even to the point where we are no longer required to remain socially distant, although face masks are still mandated for our health and safety – and many more have chosen to be vaccinated. To add to this good news, in preparation for Holy Pascha 2021, our Church field has been reseeded and is once again the pleasant lush green lawn we were accustomed to for so many years.

Our Church field is vibrant again, but can we honestly say this about the state of our souls? As we were kept from the Divine services and the Holy Mysteries for an extended period in 2020, over time this has led to the hearts of many of our faithful becoming spiritually infertile, overly concerned with worldly cares, fearful about death, even disengaged from our live-stream services, choked with the weeds of justifications and excuses, and lacking in the spiritual nourishment offered by our rich Orthodox Tradition. In the process, some have become entirely disconnected from the Church, with little or no desire to return to in-person worship and our community life for the foreseeable future. To be fair, many of our Parish members and catechumens have remained faithful in coming back to Church, and moreover during this Lenten season: But given our growing population, we are nowhere near where we should be – and, more importantly, where God wills us to be!



*(Continued on Page 3)*

## WORSHIP SCHEDULE

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

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

Holy Saturday, May 1

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

*11:00 pm Vigil of the Resurrection*

**Sunday, May 2/GREAT AND HOLY PASCHA**

*12:00 am Resurrectional Orthros and*

*Divine Liturgy - Blessing of Red Eggs*

Resurrection Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

Epistle: Acts 1:1-8

Gospel: John 1:1-17

*12:00 pm Agape Vespers and Agape Picnic*

Gospel: John 20:19-25

Monday, May 3/*St. George the Great Martyr*

*8:15 am Orthros*

*9:00 am Divine Liturgy*

Epistle: Acts 12:1-11

Gospel: John 1:18-28

Friday, May 7/*Our Most Holy Lady Theotokos, the Life-Giving Spring*

*8:15 am Orthros*

*9:00 am Divine Liturgy*

Epistle: Acts 3:1-8

Gospel: John 2:12-22

Sunday, May 9/*Sunday after Pascha/Holy Apostle Thomas/Isaiah the Prophet*

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

Epistle: Acts 5:12-20

Gospel: John 20:19-31

Wednesday, May 12

*5:45 pm Akathist to the Resurrection*

*Followed by Adult Study in Kokkos Hall at 6:30 pm*

Sunday, May 16/*3rd Sunday of Pascha: Holy Myrrh-Bearing Women/St. Joseph of Arimathea and St. Nicodemos/St. Theodoros the Sanctified*

Orthros: Tone Two

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

Epistle: Acts 6:1-7

Gospel: Mark 15:43-47; 16:1-8

*Memorials: Mary Bartsas and Departed Family;*

*Demetrios Dalacas (1 year)*

Wednesday, May 19

*5:45 pm Small Compline*

*Followed by Adult Study in Kokkos Hall at 6:30 pm*

Friday, May 21/*Ss. Constantine and Helen, Equal to the Apostles*

*8:00 am Orthros*

*9:00 am Divine Liturgy*

Epistle: Acts 26:1, 12-20

Gospel: John 10:1-9

Sunday, May 23/*4th Sunday of Pascha:*

*The Paralytic/St. Michael, Bishop of Synada*

Orthros: Tone Three

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

Epistle: Acts 9:32-42

Gospel: John 5:1-15

*Artoclasia (offered by Sophia Konsolakis)*

*Memorials: Francis O'Donnell (40 days);*

*Anna Balason (2 years)*

Wednesday, May 26/*Feast of Mid-Pentecost*

*8:00 am Orthros*

*9:00 am Divine Liturgy*

Epistle: Hebrews 13:7-16

Gospel: John 7:14-30

*5:45 pm Small Vespers for St. John the Russian*

*Followed by Adult Study in Kokkos Hall at 6:30 pm*

Sunday, May 30/*5th Sunday of Pascha:*

*The Samaritan Woman/Remembrance of all the Holy and Sanctified Patriarchs of Constantinople/*

*St. Emmelia, Mother of St. Basil the Great*

Orthros: Tone Four

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): John 20:1-10

Epistle: Acts 11:19-30

Gospel: John 4:5-42

**CHRIST IS RISEN!  
TRULY, HE IS RISEN!**

**ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ!  
ΑΛΗΘΩΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ!**

*From Father John (Continued from Page 1)*

During His Passion, our Lord Jesus Christ prayed to His Father before the Disciples, *"I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me."* (John 17:20-21) Father Barnabas Powell, our guest presenter at the recent Metropolis Clergy Laity Conference, emphasized that in order to move beyond the pandemic and return to worship, we must be mindful that GOD CREATED US TO BE TOGETHER! Jesus set the bar of unity high: Our unity as Orthodox Christians must reflect the unity of the Holy Trinity. Moreover, through our worship and Holy Mysteries, the Orthodox Faith creates the atmosphere where this unity can exist. Prior to the pandemic, our Church was battling secular conflicts, including living/working in a 24/7 city and kid's sports, that made it difficult for many to join us for our Sunday Divine Liturgy: With the added obstacle of this pandemic, along with directives to "stay apart," we have allowed (even if unintentionally) our unity to be severed. Beloved, if we are not gathering in our Church and uniting ourselves to Christ through in-person worship and the Eucharist, then how are we fulfilling our Lord's will that we be one in Him?

Just as our Church field has been regenerated in time for the Great Feast of our Lord's Resurrection, we too must do what is necessary to allow for our renewed connection to Christ, His Church and one another. Just as our lawn has been given new life through reseeded, fertilization and much needed watering, we disciples of our Risen Savior must take heed to and actively respond with full hearts to these words of the Paschal Canon: *Come, let us partake of a new drink: Not one miraculously brought forth from barren rock, but a spring of immortality, welling up from Christ's tomb, from which we draw strength."*

**CHRIST IS RISEN! ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ!**

With Love in Christ, Our Common Source of Immortality,

*Father John*



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

*From Pascha to Pentecost*

*The Spiritual Themes of the Pentecostarion*

*Wednesday Evenings, May 12 through June 23*

*6:30 - 7:30 pm in Kokkos Hall*

*We will meet first in the Church for scheduled Divine Services (please see Calendar)  
and then transition into Kokkos Hall*

*Please bring your own Bible, journal and face mask!*

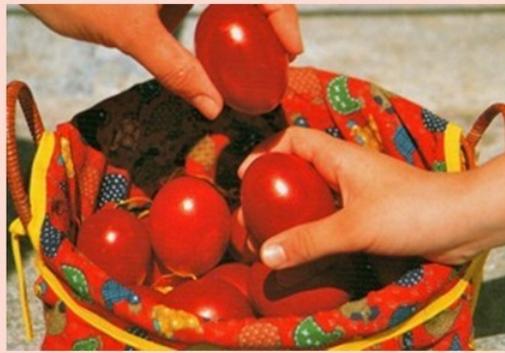


Please join us for our  
**AGAPE PICNIC**

**Holy Pascha ♦ Sunday, May 2, 2021**

**St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church**  
(On Hacienda between Jones & Torrey Pines)

**12:00 noon to 3:00 pm**  
(Agape Vespers at noon, then the Picnic begins)



*Tickets are \$20  
for either  
Traditional  
Lamb or Chicken  
Dinner Plate.*

- ♦ Greek Pastries and Bar
- ♦ Greek Music
- ♦ *Easter Egg Hunt at 2:00 pm*
- ♦ Table Reservations are Available and Encouraged
- ♦ *New: Drive-thru Takeout by Pre-Order Only*

**Χριστός Ανέστη! Christ is Risen!**

For tickets or in-person or takeout reservations,  
please call Karen at the Church Office (702) 221-8245



## Parish Council Report

Greetings to all of our Saint John the Baptist Family and *Kali Anastasi!* I pray this message finds you all in good health! As we are now into Holy Week, I am sure that you will agree that this holiest of seasons in our Church carries an extra special significance this year. As the lyrics to a popular song from the 60s told us, “You don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone” – and how true this was a year ago! Who can forget live-streaming the Holy Friday services last year and watching Fathers John and Seraphim proceed around an empty Church with the Epitaphios Icon on their shoulders? Or on Holy Saturday to witness the glory of the Resurrection, again, to an empty Church. While we are blessed to have the technology and thankful for the volunteers who provided it to us, namely Bill and Erin Bruninga, the Likourinou Family and others, the glory of our services is meant to be experienced in person and, God willing, we will soon celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior together, as it was meant to be.

This was the main theme of the Metropolis of San Francisco Clergy Laity Congress, which was recently held online and which I had the privilege to represent Saint John the Baptist as a delegate. Specifically, the presentation on the first day was entitled **Moving Beyond the Pandemic and Returning to Worship**. Father Barnabas Powell of Saints Nicholas, Raphael and Irene Greek Orthodox Church in Cumming, GA (Metropolis of Atlanta) led an enlightening discussion on this subject, and Metropolitan Gerasimos carried the theme over on the second day, and the consensus was clear: The Sacraments of our Church are truly life-giving and holy – meant to be experienced together and not experienced digitally from afar, and we are well on our way to normalcy.

During the past month, we have followed the guidelines of both our Metropolis and State and have expanded our Church’s in-person Worship capacity to 50%. We commend our parishioners who have used their good judgment in maintaining distance and safety protocols with the expanded capacity. As I am sure everyone is aware, the State will relax its social distancing rules on May 1 and capacity should be unrestricted as of June 1. If you still have a fear of crowds or are in a high risk demographic, by all means reach out to our priests for counsel and encouragement, and continue to worship in the limited way provided via live-streaming. But for the rest of us, what a wonderful time to return to our Church during the holiest of weeks. Please remain diligent as our ministries will begin to open up as well!

*On Pascha Sunday, May 2*, we will renew the decades old tradition of our Agape Picnic. The Agape Vespers will be held in the Church at noon, with the declaration of the Resurrection in so many languages, and the Picnic will begin right afterward on our beautiful grounds. Please join us for a lamb or chicken dinner with sides for the family-friendly price of \$20. There will be a bar with refreshments and the Ladies Philoptchos will be selling pastries as well as holding the Wine Wagon Raffle. We pray for great weather and look forward to seeing you all on Easter Sunday.

In addition to the core subjects covered at the Clergy Laity Congress, another agenda item was to nominate two members to the Metropolis Audit Committee, and I am pleased to inform you that our own John Karas was elected to one of these positions. As you might know, John has served many terms on our Parish Audit Committee and chairs the Finance Committee. He has been working with the Metropolis on our Parish’s behalf and was instrumental in applying for the Paycheck Protection Program on our behalf, which was extremely important in keeping our Parish solvent during the last year. We congratulate John and are certain that he will do a great job for the Metropolis.

Finally, while Stewardship is discussed in a separate column, I must take the opportunity to once again reiterate that the number of Stewards and pledge amounts are down compared to last year, while expenses, specifically maintenance costs, continue to rise. So as we approach Holy Week, I implore you to pledge if you have not done so, to send in your pledges, and if you can, to raise your level of giving.

In Christ, John Matsis, Vice President

*“So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised in imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.” (1 Corinthians 15:42-43)*

**Philoptochos  
News**

Dearest Members of Philoptochos and the St. John the Baptist Community:

Christos Anesti! As we have completed our spiritual journey through Great Lent and Holy Week, let each of us continue our philanthropic and charitable activities as individuals and as the Ladies Philoptochos Society.

*On Palm Sunday*, Philoptochos had the Collection for Epitaphion Flowers. We extend our appreciation to the St. John the Baptist Community for your wonderful generosity in your contributions. A special thank you to Karen for assisting with the donations throughout the Lenten Season.

*On Holy Thursday*, Effie Eliades-Lekar and her committee once again are completing the task of providing and coloring the beautiful red eggs that will be blessed and distributed for the Anastasi Service and Agape Picnic. Much appreciation to Effie and crew!

*On Holy Friday*, Dora Hart asks all women to join in the solemn work of decorating the Epitaphion. We are grateful to Dora for accepting the responsibility to oversee the decoration of the Icon of Virgin Mary for the Salutations to the Theotokos in the Akathist Hymn, the beautiful design of the Kouvouklion (Lord's Tomb), and for the Resurrection Services.

*On Holy Pascha, Sunday, May 2*, we will celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord with the beautiful services and, by God's grace this year, our annual Agape Picnic. Bernadette Anthony and Geri Kypreos will chair the pastry sale at the picnic. Thank you to both for your commitment to this annual event.

*Wine Wagon:* During the Agape Picnic we will also have the Wine Wagon Raffle. Please do not forget to buy raffle tickets so you can have a chance to win a wagon full of incredibly good wine: Tickets are \$5 each, or 5 for \$20. Winner need not be present. The proceeds benefit our Philoptochos commitment to the Church. Bernadette Anthony is in charge of this fun event.

*On Sunday, May 9*, Philoptochos will host a *Mothers Day Raffle*, in honor and celebration of all the wonderful mothers in our community. The prize is a spectacular diamond Cross, valued at \$1,900. The tickets are \$20 each.

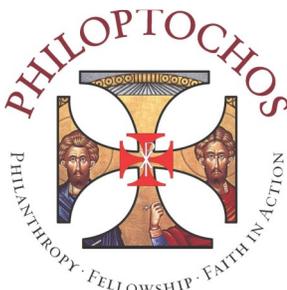
*On Tuesday, May 11*, please join us for the last *Philoptochos General Meeting at 6:00 pm in Kokkos Hall*. During the meeting we will review and discuss this year's projects and have our *Elections*. It is important for everyone to participate and have input. If any member is interested in becoming a Board member, please contact me at (702) 885-6217.

*On Sunday, May 16*, please join us for *the Bartsas Memorial*, in remembrance of and appreciation for the benefactor of our chapter, Mary Bartsas. Her generosity continues through her family, allowing for the sustenance and growth of our Social Services Committee and its benevolent outreach.

*Finally, on Tuesday, May 25*, we invite all women to our *President's Dinner at 5:30 pm at Elia Authentic Greek Taverna (8615 W. Sahara)*. The price is \$50 per person. Please RSVP with Karen at the Church Office *by May 20*.

My gratitude and love to the Philoptochos Board and members for making the past two years of my presidency a true blessing in my life. My love for each of you amazing ladies will continue always. May Christ continue to bless you and your families.

With Love in Christ, Benita Beeman, Philoptochos President



**Attention, Graduates:**

We want to share the good news of your commencement in the June issue of *The Desert Messenger*! If you (or your child) will be graduating soon from high school or university, please email the following to [frjohn@vegasgreekorthodox.com](mailto:frjohn@vegasgreekorthodox.com) by *May 15, 2021*:

- School from which you are graduating,
- The degree you will receive, including honors,
- What your plans are, and what you will study if pursuing further education, and
- Most importantly, a photo of you in JPG format!



## *Stewardship and Community Outreach*

What an amazingly blessed time of year we have come to once again. As we have passed through all the wonderful services, it has truly been a joy to see many of our faithful community members return to our beloved Church! One particular Lenten Sunday morning comes to mind and makes my heart full. During the homily as I sat in the exedra trying to listen, the swarm of little ones in the pews continually distracted me. What a pleasant sight to see families with their children coming once again to receive God's Grace!

We have slowly seen an overall returning of many dear souls that we have missed in worship during the last several months due to one reason or another. We hope that the zeal and excitement of participating in Christ's Passion and Holy Resurrection continues in all of our lives throughout the year. With the abundance of blessings we receive through the Lord's love and mercy, may we always remember to offer our "first fruits" to Him, through financially supporting St. John the Baptist Parish.

With Much Love in the Risen Lord, Justina Szukiewicz,  
On behalf of the Stewardship and Outreach Committee

## PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND



You are invited and encouraged to join  
Metropolitan Ilia of Philomelion and Very Reverend Father John Hondros on  
A Spiritual Pilgrimage to the Jordan River for the Feast of Holy Theophany and  
throughout the Holy Land, including Petra in Jordan and  
St. Catherine's Monastery at Mt. Sinai in Egypt

*January 13 - 27, 2022.*

All inclusive price is \$5,265 for double occupancy.  
You can get the registration form and full itinerary

at [www.mgatours.com](http://www.mgatours.com), or by contacting

Victoria Xikis at (702) 419-5294

or Paula Kelesis at (702) 249-4740.

*Deadline to register and pay is September 15, 2021.*

## 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:  
Anne Pantelas & Maha Habiba

Orthodox Family Fellowship:  
Imtisal Amy Khuri & April Rivera

Young Adults:  
Fr. Seraphim

Greek Folk Dance: Sia Dalacas

Greek School: Paula Kelesis

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

Kali Parea: Demetrios Asim

Adult Basketball:  
TBD

Forerunners: Victoria Xikis

Orthodox Bookstore:  
Paraskevi Santamaria

Greek Food Festival: Gus Flangas

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

Photography & Live-Streaming:  
Bill & Erin Bruninga



# CONNECTION!

*“ . . . that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us . . . ” (John 17:21)*

## CONNECTING WITH . . . CHRIST OUR CHURCH AND ONE ANOTHER

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

+++++

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 2021 CONNECTION

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church  
Las Vegas, Nevada

As a blessed member of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, I/we commit to \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
per week/month, with the total amount for the year 2021 of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Orthodox Christian: Yes No

Orthodox Christian: Yes No

Others sharing in the gift (children): \_\_\_\_\_

## Ministry News

### Church School

Hi Everyone! Christos Anesti! Christ is Risen!

Thank God we are getting back to somewhat normal. We will keep everyone posted on Church School for the Fall. Stay tuned!

A special thank you to everyone who donated eggs and candy for our annual Pascha Egg Hunt! Please join us for this fun event at the Agape Picnic *on Sunday, May 2 at 2:00 pm*. We appreciate your self-sacrificial donation of time and energy for our Egg Hunt, as well as the generosity of the Ladies Philoptochos for their donation for candy and eggs.

I hope everyone is enjoying the *Orthodox Journeys* Curriculum that Karen emails every week. They are full of great information for at-home Church School: Our home must be the “first parish” where our Orthodox Faith is taught and put into practice.

Finally, a special thank you to 13 Myrrh Bearers and dedicated Altar Servers for our Holy Week and Pascha Services: It was a real treat witnessing your love and service to our Lord and our Church!

Please reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns. I cannot wait to see everyone in Church!  
In Christ, Eileen Koutsulis, Church School Director (702) 521-6516



### Combined May Event for Orthodox Family Fellowship and GOYA

Christ is Risen!

Calling all families and youth of St. John the Baptist Church: Come and celebrate the continuing joy of Christ's Resurrection in the festal season of the Pentecostarion with a trip to Mt. Charleston *on Saturday, May 29 at 10:30 am*. We will meet at the *Butterfly (Ah See Votz)* Loop Road Group Picnic Area, which the Church has rented for the day.

We will enjoy an outdoor excursion potluck, barbeque, and hike! At the beginning of the summer, as Vegas continues to heat up, it is the perfect time to get out of the high temperature in the valley and ascend to the cooler mountain climate and enjoy a day away from the noise and hustle of the city. Please remember to bring your hiking shoes, sunscreen/or a hat, lots of water, meat to grill, food for your family and to share, portable chairs to sit, etc.

Please contact Father Seraphim at [frseraphim@vegasgreekorthodox.com](mailto:frseraphim@vegasgreekorthodox.com) or (702) 768-7480 for questions and to RSVP. Love in the Risen Lord, Father Seraphim

### Young Adults

Christ is Risen!

Please join us for a Young Adult BBQ *on Sunday, May 16, from 1:00 to 4:00 pm* on the Church Field. We will be barbequing hot dogs and hamburgers – and if you would like to bring your own meat to put on the grill, please do so!



We will additionally be setting up our Parish volleyball net on the newly seeded and soft springy grass, and will also enjoy Frisbee, bocce ball, a water balloon toss, and more fun games. Feel free to bring any activity you are interested in and would like to share! To RSVP and for questions, please contact Father Seraphim at [frseraphim@vegasgreekorthodox.com](mailto:frseraphim@vegasgreekorthodox.com) or (702) 768-7480. We hope to see you there as we build up our Young Adult community – those who are college-age through their 30s.

Christos Anesti! Father Seraphim

# Hot Sun? Cool Down!

Come to the Parish-Wide  
Potluck Picnic at  
Mt. Charleston

Saturday, May 29  
10:30 am – 3:30 pm

Everyone is invited!

Join us as we escape the heat in Vegas and soak up the cooler temperatures among the pine trees.

Please bring a main dish or side dish to share and enjoy a communal picnic – then go hiking, exploring, or just relax!

Lawn chairs are encouraged! Jackets are also recommended, just in case.

FYI, cell phones don't work in Lee Canyon.

## DIRECTIONS:

Lee Canyon, Foxtail Group Picnic Area, "Butterfly" Site

*For mapping programs use one of these addresses:*

*"Forest Road 106, Las Vegas, NV 89124" or "NF-106, Las Vegas, NV 89124."*

- Take 95 North from Las Vegas.
- About 15 minutes outside of town, turn LEFT on NV 156 / Lee Canyon.
- Drive 15.9 miles to the Foxtail Group Picnic Area, on the LEFT
- Tell the gate attendant you're with the "St. John" group
- Drive to the "Butterfly" site.

Carpooling is encouraged!

QUESTIONS? Call or e-mail Fr. Seraphim at 702-768-7480 or [frseraphim@vegasgreekorthodox.com](mailto:frseraphim@vegasgreekorthodox.com)

## From Father Seraphim

Christ is Risen!

This month is especially bright this year as the entire period of May will be filled with the Light of Christ's Resurrection. If we think back to last Pascha every single one of us will pause and give most sincere thanks to the All-Merciful Lord for the blessing and privilege of being inside our beloved Church, able to proclaim the Joy of the Risen Lord with a full and double fervor – soberly aware and cognizant of our inability to do so last year in 2020. This month I want to explore a particular prophecy of Jesus concerning His Death and Resurrection, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew and having to do with the Prophet Jonah. The only “sign” which Jesus promised to give to those asking for signs and wonders as tests of His veracity as the Messiah was the “Sign of Jonah.”



Just who was Jonah? The 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC righteous preacher of repentance to the Ninevites is most famous for his refusal to initially obey God and go to Nineveh, his sojourn in the belly of a great sea monster (Greek *ketos*) after being thrown overboard from a boat and swallowed, his prayer and three day sojourn in the depths, and his subsequent repentance, regurgitation on dry land, and Nineveh's salvation. The prophet Jonah is commemorated in the Orthodox Church on September 21 and was the son of Amittai (referenced only in *2 Samuel 14:25*). The *Typikon*, or order of the services in the Orthodox Church, calls for the entire book of Jonah in the Old

Testament to be read on *Great and Holy Saturday*. This is the very day that Christ is “swallowed by death” – that voracious ancient enemy of the human race – and descends into the “maw of Hades,” corresponding to how Jonah descended within the sea beast into the depths of the sea and, “*Cried out to God from the depths of Hades.*” (*Jonah 2:2*) This links Jonah specifically as a “type” or foreshadowing of Christ Who descends into death like some great beast; He then plunders Hades and emerges unscathed just as Jonah was deposited on dry land.

St. Gregory of Nyssa – one of the Three Cappadocian Fathers who expounded the Orthodox doctrine of The Holy Trinity in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century – put forth the persuasive teaching that death's “swallowing” of the flesh of Christ was really a trick by the Son of God in exploiting the voracious and never-satisfied eater of our human nature. In his *Catechetical Discourse* St. Gregory (who was also the younger brother of St. Basil the Great) writes, “*Since it was not in the nature of the opposing power to undergo the unveiled manifestation of God, the deity was hidden under the veil of our nature, so that, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the deity might be gulped down along with the bait of the flesh. In this way, he who practiced deception receives the very same in return. He who first deceived humanity by the bait of sensual pleasure is himself deceived by the presence of the human form. And whereas the enemy wrought his deception for the ruin of our nature, the wise one used His plan of deception for salvation.*” This “deceiving of the deceiver” allows Hades and Death to be personified and having greedily “gulped down” the Body of Jesus like the entire human race before Him as the “ancient leviathan” (*Psalm 74:14; Isaiah 27:1*); the end result is that now they have a sort of terrible indigestion and must disgorge not only Christ – Whom they cannot contain – but all those prisoners who were waiting for the Messiah to save them!

*(Continued on Page 12)*

## *From Father Seraphim (Continued from Page 11)*

The hymns of Holy Saturday, the day on which Christ “rests” in the tomb while His soul descends in the “harrowing of Hades,” pick up this theme as Christ’s Resurrection images Jonah’s own vomiting out of the belly of the great sea creature: “Today, Hades groans and cries out, *“My power has been swallowed up; the Shepherd has been crucified; and He raised Adam. I have been deprived of those, over whom I ruled; and I have thrown up all those, whom I had swallowed when I was strong. He Who was crucified has emptied the tombs. The power of death is no longer in force.”* Glory to Your Cross and Your Resurrection, O Lord!” (7<sup>th</sup> Idiomelon – Vespers Divine Liturgy of Holy Saturday)

Another spiritual link that connects Jonah in the belly of the great fish to Christ is recorded in one of the published Poems of St. Gregory the Theologian. According to St. Gregory, when Jonah cried to God from within the belly of the *ketos* he did so with his arms extended outward making the form of the Cross with his body: “O Christ my King, when Jonah opened wide his arms in prayer in the monsters’ entrails he was delivered by Your power from the whale.” This foreshadowing is taken up in many other hymns sung on Jonah’s feast day and the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross (*September 14*) and eventuates in Jonah being spewed forth and saved. Because Jonah prayed “in the form of the Cross” he is even more closely identified with Christ on the Cross.

Christ Himself spoke the first words of *Psalms 22* from the Cross and continued to recite the Psalms in order right up to the moment He said, *“Into Thy hands I commend My spirit.”* (*Psalms 31:5*) Just a few verses into *Psalms 22* – which is a blow by blow recounting of Christ’s Crucifixion from the perspective of the One hanging on the Cross – we hear the prophecy of David now on the Messiah’s own lips, *“I am a worm and not a man.”* (*Psalms 22:6*) Like a “worm” writhing on the “hook of the Cross” the King is enthroned, turning His ultimate humiliation into the moment of His triumph and glory. In the very moment of His greatest “weakness” Christ enticed and tricked our ancient enemy in a mystery hidden before the ages: *“Which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”* (*1 Corinthians 2:8*) St. Gregory of Nyssa again comments on the relationship of the devil, or death to “swallowing” and being “hooked” in another treatise called *On the Three-Day Period between the Death and Resurrection of Christ*: “For this reason, having swallowed the bait of the flesh, He was pierced with the fishhook of deity, and so the dragon was caught with the fishhook, just as it is said in the book of Job, *‘You shall catch the dragon with a fishhook.’* (*Job 40:25*)” This is how, *“Having disarmed principalities and powers, Christ made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in the Cross.”* (*Colossians 2:15*)

Christ crucified is the Wisdom of God and the Power of God. He Who is greater in Wisdom than Solomon, *“the wisest of all the kings of the earth”* (*1 Kings 4:30*), overturned the power of *“the dragon the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan.”* (*Revelation 20:2*) For in the words of St. Paul, *“The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”* (*1 Corinthians 1:25*) The humble obedience of Christ, *“unto death, even death on a Cross”* (*Philippians 2:8*), is more powerful than our ancient enemy: *“The devil who prowls around like a roaring lion (or a great hungry fish!) looking for someone to devour.”* (*1 Peter 5:8*)

May we also be obedient to our Risen Savior and His life-saving commandments so that we will not be handed over as food to death, but like Jonah, and moreover our Lord Jesus Christ, we will also be partakers of the Resurrection, receiving our final salvation from the realm of Hades and the Devil. May we forever be with Christ in the love of His Father and the Communion of the Holy Spirit!

With Love in Christ,

*Father Seraphim*

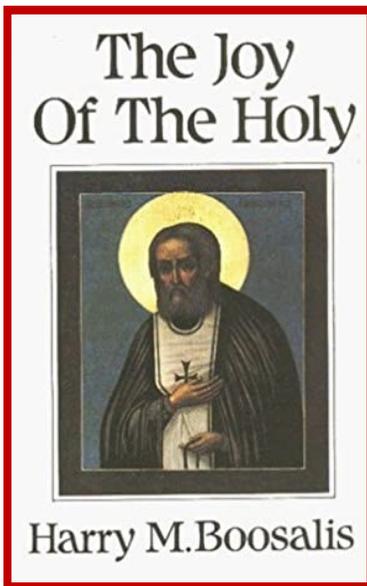


## Orthodox Bookstore

Greetings from the Bookstore! Christos Anesti!

One of the most popular sayings of St. Seraphim of Sarov regarding the spiritual life was that, “The goal of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.” We all know that it was the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that established the Church as the Body of Christ and thus the striving in all of us toward our own personal Pentecost, so to speak, as Orthodox Christians fully immersed in Christ’s Mystical Body over a lifetime. Since we are moving forward to the Feast of Pentecost over the next fifty days and the celebration of the Holy Spirit, this month’s featured selection is *The Joy of the Holy: Saint Seraphim of Sarov and Orthodox Spiritual Life* by Harry Boosalis. Boosalis is a graduate of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts – the Seminary that our Parish supports annually. Dr. Boosalis currently serves as Professor of Dogmatic Theology at St. Tikhon’s Orthodox Seminary in South Canaan, Pennsylvania.

In 1990, the relics of Saint Seraphim (born Prokhor Moshnin on July 19, 1759 in Kursk, Russia) were discovered in the basement of a former Kazan Cathedral that had been converted into a Museum of Atheism by the Soviets. A renewed interest in him was thus “sweeping the Russian nation, and indeed the entire Orthodox Christian world,” and marked a “growing sense of awareness and appreciation of the rich spiritual heritage of the Orthodox Church.” (Boosalis, 1993) Moreover, according to Boosalis, “The attraction of his teaching lies in the very practical way he presents the heights of Orthodox Christian spiritual life as being open and accessible to all. Whatever one’s status in life or position within the Church, every faithful member of the Body of Christ possesses the same potential for acquiring the grace of the Holy Spirit. This is the same



grace of the same Holy Spirit who has been saving and sanctifying the saints throughout the centuries, up to this very day. St. Seraphim of Sarov is noted for the distinct character of his message, which is especially relevant to the needs of contemporary man . . . and is living proof that modern man can indeed acquire the same fullness of grace of the Holy Spirit which has manifested itself throughout the history of the Orthodox Church.”

*The Joy of the Holy* captures the life of Saint Seraphim, his message, the well-known mystical event of “The Conversation” with his friend and lifelong disciple, Nicholas Motovilov, about truly experiencing the grace of the Holy Spirit, the role of *asceticism*, and of course the inner life of prayer. Lastly, some of his spiritual instructions are provided to the faithful on God, Faith, Spiritual Peace, Patience and Humility, culminating in Prayer and the Church.

From the *Spiritual Instructions on the Peace of the Soul*: “This peace, which our Lord Jesus Christ gave to His disciples before His death, is like no other treasure on earth, for as He said, *‘Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you.’ (John 14:27)* Likewise, the Apostle said, *‘The peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.’ (Philippians 4:7; Hebrews 12:14)* Therefore, in order to receive the peace of God, we must concentrate all of our thoughts, desires and actions and ceaselessly cry together with the Church: *‘O Lord our God, grant us peace!’ (Psalms 77:4)*”

Stop by the Bookstore for your copy and let the beauty of St. Seraphim’s example and wisdom inspire you this season of Pentecost and beyond!

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

***“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain .”***  
***(1 Corinthians 15:58)***

*Our Church is open for the scheduled Divine Services. Per the State mandate, face masks are required but social distancing has been lifted. If you have been sick for the last 48 hours, please do not come to Church. If you are unable to come to Church, your Priests are here to light a candle for you and your loved ones. Please call Karen with your request.*



**2021 Stewardship Report**  
(as of 4/26/21)

Stewardship Gifts Pledged: \$378,351 (\$434,300 in 2020)  
 Stewardship Gifts Received: \$207,980 (\$231,364 in 2020)  
 Unfulfilled Pledge Balance: \$170,371 (\$202,936 in 2020)  
 Stewardship Families Pledged: 320 (331 in 2020)  
 Average Pledge to Date: \$1,182 (\$1,312 in 2020)  
 2021 Budgeted Goal: \$500,000 ... Keep the Pledges Coming!

**Church Account Summaries - March 2021**

| Nevada State Bank Accounts                     | February            | Deposits          | Transfers In    | Withdraws/<br>Checks | Transfers Out      | March               | Notes   |
|--|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---|
|  | Ending Balance      |                   |                 |                      |                    | Ending Balance      |   |
| General Operating Account (GOA)                | \$207,652.72        | \$54,165.91       | \$20,874.62     | \$12,982.56          | \$61,408.18        | \$208,302.51        |   |
| Community and Education (C&E)                  | \$1,673.17          | \$1,500.00        |                 |                      | \$384.16           | \$2,789.01          | \$384.16 purchased Coca Cola syrup products.  |
| Greek Food Festival (GFF)                      | \$1,257.84          |                   |                 | \$15.00              |                    | \$1,242.84          |   |
| Designated, Restricted & Other (DR&O)          | \$260,547.65        | \$8,053.00        | \$300.00        | \$258.40             | \$20,383.15        | \$248,259.10        | All checks were for Bookstore merchandise and Transfers out were for Bookstore/PPP W-2. |
| Folk Dance Group                               | \$17,966.00         |                   | \$100.00        |                      | \$100.00           | \$17,966.00         | Transfers were to create activity to avoid "Dormant" status                             |
| Hellenic Historical Society                    | \$3,292.94          |                   | \$100.00        |                      | \$100.00           | \$3,292.94          | Transfers were to create activity to avoid "Dormant" status                             |
| Designated Funds                               | February            | Deposits          | Transfers In    | Withdraws/<br>Checks | Transfers Out      | March               | Notes   |
|  | Ending Balance      |                   |                 |                      |                    | Ending Balance      |   |
| Bookstore                                      | \$8,535.78          | \$3,003.00        |                 | \$258.40             | \$1,426.06         | \$9,854.32          |   |
| Ornaments                                      | \$1,169.41          |                   |                 |                      |                    | \$1,169.41          |   |
| Restricted Funds                               | February            | Deposits          | Transfers In    | Withdraws/<br>Checks | Transfers Out      | March               | Notes   |
|  | Ending Balance      |                   |                 |                      |                    | Ending Balance      |   |
| PPP W-2  | \$32,310.00         |                   |                 |                      | \$18,957.09        | \$13,352.91         | Transferred funds to GOA for payroll  |
| ICON   | \$140,376.44        | \$50.00           | \$200.00        |                      |                    | \$140,626.44        |   |
| Library Account                                | \$1,470.77          |                   |                 |                      |                    | \$1,470.77          |   |
| Giving Tree                                    | \$1,936.97          |                   |                 |                      |                    | \$1,936.97          |   |
| Faithtree                                      | \$1,626.39          |                   |                 |                      |                    | \$1,626.39          |   |
| Building Fund                                  | \$26,169.26         |                   | \$100.00        |                      |                    | \$26,269.26         |   |
| Youth Choir                                    | \$2,989.18          |                   |                 |                      |                    | \$2,989.18          |   |
| Church School                                  | \$1,306.37          |                   |                 |                      |                    | \$1,306.37          |   |
| Three Priests                                  | \$39,033.50         |                   |                 |                      |                    | \$39,033.50         |   |
| Roof Appeal                                    | \$3,041.22          | \$5,000.00        |                 |                      |                    | \$8,041.22          | Donation from Philoptochos  |
| Altar Servers                                  | \$440.00            |                   |                 |                      |                    | \$440.00            |   |
| GOYA   | \$142.36            |                   |                 |                      |                    | \$142.36            |   |
| <b>Designated, Restricted, and Other Total</b> | <b>\$260,547.65</b> | <b>\$8,053.00</b> | <b>\$300.00</b> | <b>\$258.40</b>      | <b>\$20,383.15</b> | <b>\$248,259.10</b> |   |
| Other Funds                                    | February            | Deposits          | Transfers In    | Withdraws/<br>Checks | Transfers Out      | March               | Notes   |
|  | Ending Balance      |                   |                 |                      |                    | Ending Balance      |   |
| Kokkos Scholarship Fund                        | \$78,372.33         |                   |                 |                      |                    | \$78,372.33         |   |

**March 2021 Candles** \$7,037.00  
**March 2021 Trays** \$4,157.00  
**Total March 2021 Candles & Trays** \$11,194.00



# *The Desert Messenger*

*St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church  
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Las Vegas, Nevada 89118-1922*

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HOLY PASCHA  
SUNDAY, MAY 2!



THE DESERT MESSENGER

## *The Way of the Lord*



*“Death is  
swallowed up  
in victory.  
O death, where  
is your victory?  
O death, where  
is your sting?  
... But thanks  
be to God, Who  
gives us the  
victory through  
our Lord Jesus  
Christ.”  
(1 Corinthians  
15:55,57)*