

The Desert



Messenger

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

Volume 19, Issue 3 St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Las Vegas, NV

March 2021

**From
Father
John**

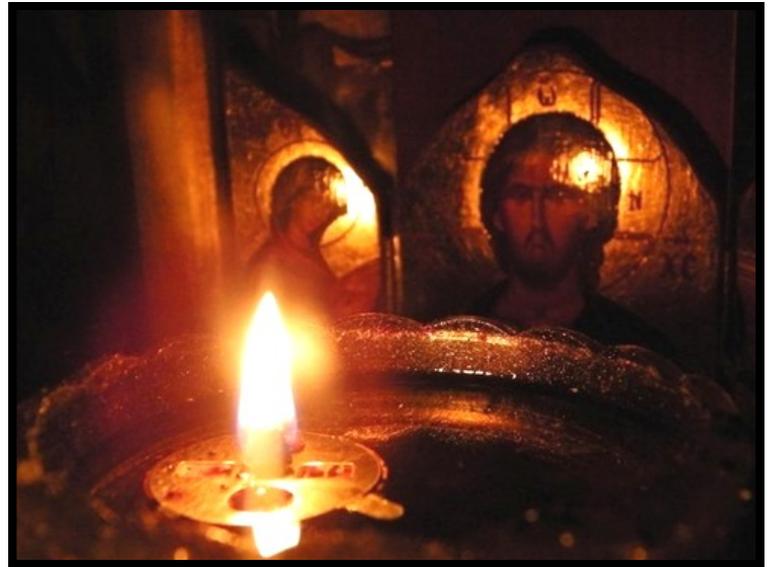
Beloved in Christ:

This month we reach the one-year mark when the world, and consequently our Church services and ministries, came to a screeching halt due to the COVID 19 pandemic. We were into the second week of Lent, having celebrated the Triumph of Orthodoxy and the last in-person service with the Presanctified Liturgy, and literally overnight we – along with almost every other parish worldwide – resorted to live-streamed services with a handful of people present in the Church building. It was, without question, the most trying, humbling and, admittedly, downright depressing Lent, Holy Week and Pascha ever: Not one of us was trained to be a priest during a pandemic, and worshipping during the holiest season of the year without the physical presence of the faithful was like a spiritual journey into the arid wilderness that did not even let up with the Great Feast of Holy Pascha. Fortunately, here in Las Vegas we enjoyed somewhat of a reprieve on the Sunday of Pentecost in early June, when a restricted amount of people were allowed back into the Church with a new look, donning face masks and practicing social distancing.

One year later, we anticipate having our Church at 50 percent capacity – still with face masks and practicing social distancing – as we enter into the 40-day Great Fast of Lent, and for this we are grateful to our merciful God. Although we remain in the midst of a pandemic, we are hopefully seeing light at the end of this very dark, extended and life-threatening tunnel – so much so, that we look forward, albeit cautiously, to celebrating Holy Pascha with an outdoor picnic so that we may as a community proclaim to one another in person, “Christ is Risen!” That is the goal, but as we have learned this past year . . . let us pray, then wait and see what awaits us on the horizon.

Before we can speak about celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, our holy Orthodox Church calls us – in preparation for this Feast of Feasts – to actively engage in a lengthy season of intensified prayer, increased worship, fasting and repentance. Given that all of us “missed out” or, at the most, “participated virtually” in the holy season last year, Great Lent affords us an amazing and potentially life-changing opportunity to connect with Christ and His Church in a deeper and more significant way. If we have become somewhat complacent, let us step up our personal daily prayer life. If we have been reluctant to return to Church, let us take baby steps and show up in person for a less crowded weekday Lenten service. If we have fallen out of the habit of fasting, let us start on the first day of Lent, **Monday, March 15**. And if we have held in a lot of anger or frustration – or perhaps lashed out at others, including online – or become depressed or despondent, or become dependent on or addicted to unhealthy habits during this pandemic . . . let us take a positive step forward for our souls and come to the Sacrament of Holy Confession!

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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>*

Saturday, March 6/*1st Saturday of Souls/Finding of the Blessed Cross by St. Helen*

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial

Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

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

Sunday, March 7/*Meatfare Sunday/The Last Judgment/The Seven Hieromartyrs of Cherson*

Orthros: Tone Six (Plagal Second)

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): Luke 24:36-53

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

Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

Abstain from Meat this Week

Tuesday, March 9/*The 40 Holy Martyrs of Sebaste*

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy

Epistle: Hebrews 12:1-10

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

Artoclasia (Offered by Lekar/Szukiewicz Families)

Saturday, March 13/*2nd Saturday of Souls/Recovery of the Relics of St. Nikephoros of Constantinople/Memory of the Holy Ascetics*

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial

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

Gospel: Matthew 6:1-13

Sunday, March 14/*Cheesefare Sunday/Forgiveness Sunday/Expulsion of Adam from Paradise/St. Benedict of Nursia*

Orthros: Tone Seven (Grave)

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

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

Gospel: Matthew 6:14-21

Memorials: Robert Anastasios Snowden (40 days); and Chloe Nickolson Christian (1 year).

Forgiveness Vespers follows Divine Liturgy

Abstain from Meat and Dairy for 40 Days

Monday, March 15/*Clean Monday: 1st Day of Lent*
6:00 pm Great Compline

Wednesday, March 17/*St. Alexios the Man of God*
6:00 pm Presanctified Liturgy

Friday, March 19

6:30 pm First Salutations to the Theotokos

Saturday, March 20/*3rd Saturday of Souls/Miracle of St. Theodore the Recruit and the Kollyva/The Fathers of the Monastery of St. Savas*

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial

Epistle: 2 Timothy 2:1-10

Gospel: Mark 2:23-28, 3:1-5

Sunday, March 21/*1st Sunday of Lent/Triumph of Orthodoxy/St. James the Confessor*

Orthros: Tone Eight (Fourth Plagal)

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

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

Gospel: John 1:43-51

Procession of Icons follows Divine Liturgy

Memorials: Helen Mulopulos (40 days); and William Liaos (2 years).

Monday, March 22

6:00 pm Great Compline

Wednesday, March 24

6:00 pm Great Vespers of the Annunciation

Thursday, March 25/*Annunciation of our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary*

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy

Epistle: Hebrews 2:11-18

Gospel: Luke 1:24-38

Friday, March 26

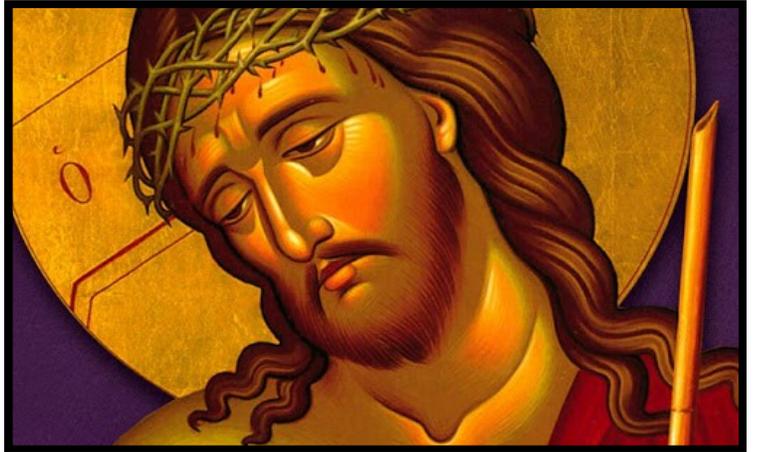
6:30 pm Second Salutations to the Theotokos

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"He who walks in uprightness fears the Lord..." (Proverbs 14:2)

From Father John (Continued from Page 1)

If we choose to, and certainly the Church gives us the necessary tools, Lent can be the time for us to decisively make a fresh start in our physical, emotional and especially spiritual life. As the springboard into this holy season, our Lord gives us the following commandment (not suggestion, mind you): *“If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:14-15)* If we are



unwilling to forgive others from the bottom of our hearts, our fasting will only be pleasing to the demons: On the contrary, to engage in a fast that is pleasing to God, Jesus *“teaches us not to remember wrongs,”* wrote Blessed Theophylact. *“He reminds us of the Father so that we might revere Him, since we are the children of such a Father, and not act as fierce beasts, refusing to forgive.”* My beloved, forgiveness is the mark of true repentance, and the sign of God’s operative grace at work in us. May each of us have a blessed and spiritually fruitful Lent!

With Much Love in Christ,

WORSHIP SCHEDULE

(Continued from Page 2)

Sunday, March 28/*2nd Sunday of Lent/
St. Gregory Palamas Archbishop of Thessaloniki*

Orthros: Tone One

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

Epistle: Hebrews 1:10-14; 2:1-3

Gospel: Mark 2:1-12

Memorials: Andreas Christou (1 year); and
Christos Patsis (1 year).

Monday, March 29

6:00 pm *Great Compline*

Wednesday, March 31

6:00 pm *Presanctified Liturgy*



*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**

Greetings to all of our Saint John Family and I pray this finds you all in good health! As we approach March we are coming close to Pascha and the Resurrection of our Lord, and we pray that this celebration carries even more significance this year as we come out of the darkness of all of the constraints that COVID-19 has put on society in general and our community in particular!

March 15 is the beginning of Lent, and by that time we are hopeful that we will receive directive from the state to allow 50 percent capacity for our services. Between the Church and Panos Hall, this would allow significant attendance at all of our services. And God willing, the Parish Council is planning on holding our Agape Picnic this year as the first social event of our Parish since the pandemic began.

As we did not hold a Greek Food Festival last year, you might have noticed that the lawn has not been maintained and is in bad shape; however, it has now been reseeded, the irrigation system has been repaired, and we will have a healthy lawn for the Agape Picnic *on Sunday, May 2*, as well as the 2021 Greek Food Festival, which is being planned for *September 10-12*. We are cautiously optimistic that we will be able to host these two events, and how wonderful it will be for us as a community to work and celebrate together once again. Of course, you will be hearing more information about both of these events in the coming weeks and months.

If you have not yet made your 2021 Pledge, please do so. The number of pledges is down compared to last year at this time, although the individual giving is higher. We do not need to reiterate the hardships that have occurred due to services first being shut down and then having reduced attendance, so please be generous as we all work together to get back toward normalcy.

As previously mentioned, our Parish received the Payroll Protection Program loans last year for personnel and Clergy, and I am happy to say that the personnel loan has been completely forgiven and the Clergy loan has been partially forgiven. Further, we have applied for and been awarded the Phase 2 loan of PPP for staff, and we are confident that we will be forgiven on paying back this loan as well. We cannot overstate how helpful these forgivable loans have been for the day to day operation of our Church.

We look forward to seeing you all this spring during the Lenten Season as we open up with the goal of full attendance and activities in the near future.

John Matsis, Parish Council Vice-President



**Philoptochos
News**

Dearest Sisters of Philoptochos and Our Beloved St. John the Baptist Community,
As Great Lent begins, let us focus on drawing closer to God, spiritual renewal, self-awareness in the light of the Gospel, and recognize the fullness of the life in Christ to which each person is called. Time spent in reflection and prayer is the tried and true way to a deeper connection with God, oneself, our neighbor, and the poor.

On February 7, in recognition of our Departed Philoptochos Members, there was a memorial remembering and honoring all the wonderful women who came before us for their dedicated service and the treasure they have passed on to us.

On February 21, Father John gave a beautiful presentation on the mission of the Metropolis of San Francisco Philoptochos Kids 'n' Cancer Ministry to provide support for children afflicted with cancer. A collection was taken after the Divine Liturgy, and our parish members responded generously. Kids 'n' Cancer Camp Agape offers a life-changing, all-expense paid experience for children and their families. It provides opportunities for enjoyment, learning, and building self-esteem and confidence in a safe setting. The kindness and caring that surrounds children suffering from cancer offers an ideal environment for therapy and healing.

This month, *Sunday of Forgiveness is on March 14 and Great Lent begins on Monday, March 15.* There will be a *Philoptochos Zoom General Meeting on Tuesday, March 23, at 6:30 pm.* All ladies of our Church community are welcome and encouraged to participate. We will send out the Zoom information the week before the meeting.

Upcoming Events:

Sunday, April 4 – Veneration of the Holy Cross: Presentation and Collection benefitting Hellenic College/Holy Cross School of Theology.

Palm Sunday, April 25 – Collection for Epitaphion Flowers.

Holy Thursday, April 29 – Dyeing Red Eggs.

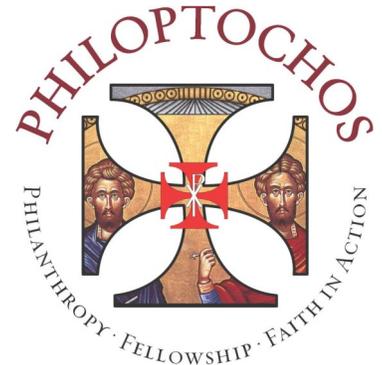
Holy Friday, April 30 – Epitaphion Decorating.

Holy Pascha, Sunday, May 2 – Wine Wagon Raffle at Agape Picnic.

Tuesday, May 4 at 6:30 pm – Zoom Philoptochos General Meeting and Elections.

Sunday, May 15 – Memorial for Benefactor Mary Bartsas and Departed Family Members.

Tuesday, May 25 – Presidents Dinner.



During Lent and throughout this year, we can grow in our faith by reflecting on God's Word. Let us never forget, when we see those in despair, to reach out and offer a helping hand.

With Love in Christ, Benita Beeman, Philoptochos President

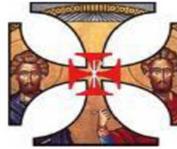
*Our Church is open for the scheduled Divine Services,
on a first come/first served basis.*

*Once our Church has reached capacity,
per the State mandates, our Parish members
will be directed to Panos Hall.*

*There will be no Fellowship Hour or Kollyva
until the restrictions are lifted.*

*For the health and safety of all,
please follow the posted guidelines.*

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society ~ Panagia Chapter



PHILOPTOCHOS ~ FRIENDS OF THE POOR

Philoptochos Stewardship for 2021

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

National Philoptochos Commitment		\$15.00
Metropolis Philoptochos Commitment		\$15.00
St. John Church Panagia Chapter Minimum		<u>\$10.00</u>
	TOTAL	\$40.00
Seniors ~ 65 Plus (\$5.00 discount)		
Additional Donation		\$ _____
Total Enclosed		\$ _____

Please return to: St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
5300 South El Camino Road
Las Vegas, NV 89118
Attn: Ladies Philoptochos/Membership
Make check payable to: Ladies Philoptochos Society

From Father Seraphim

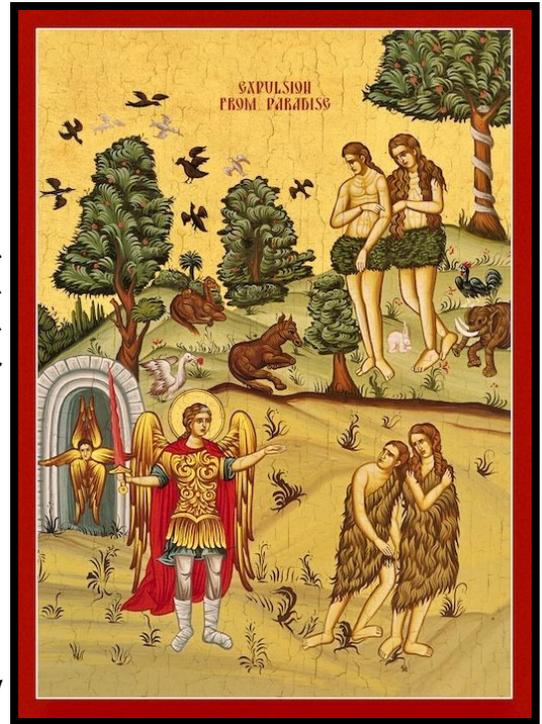
As we begin the Triodion and prepare to embark on the Lenten journey to the Crucifixion and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, I would like to contemplate and examine one aspect of Lent – namely, fasting. Fasting is an essential practice in Orthodox Christianity, which derives from the Gospel itself and the very command of our Savior: ***“When you fast do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.” (Matthew 6:16)*** That is an imperative command! Orthodoxy is essentially a way of life that involves concrete spiritual practices, of which fasting is just one. These practices are not the end; they themselves are not the aim or goal. Rather, the spiritual disciplines of the Life in Christ are the indispensable means toward the goal of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, fasting was the very first command from God to mankind: ***“Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” (Genesis 2:17)*** Abstinence – to fast from eating – was the very commandment upon which we were to exercise our free will and proceed in obedience to God toward union with Him in Paradise. We failed. Our Lord warned, ***“On the day you eat of it surely you shall die.” (Genesis 2:17)*** By an act of *eating* we were kicked out of the Garden of Delights and cursed. In fulfillment of God’s word, the separation of the soul from Him in sin was the spiritual death experienced when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. We fast therefore to regain Paradise.

In the history of salvation we see a much deeper – indeed, essential – practice in fasting. Man was made “hungry” and not just for the material food offered by the world – but for Divine Life and communion with God. We possess an infinite desiring capacity (in our souls) in the face of which no finite thing can ever satisfy us. Fasting is a tool to develop our self-control and to tame the passions. If we cannot control what our own hand puts in our mouth, what can we control? Certainly not what comes out of our mouth! We engage in this discipline out of obedience to Christ and His Church. In the Orthodox Church we fast on Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year and for four special fasting periods: Lent and Holy Week, the Apostles Fast, the Dormition Fast, and the Nativity Fast. “Strict Fast” means simply that entire day, from midnight until midnight, we do not eat meat, eggs, dairy, or fish. That is the letter of the law. The spirit of the law is to experience the sensation of hunger and not to immediately quench it with something dead.

All food is dead: Meat of course is the flesh of a dead animal, but even fruits taken from trees, if you leave them, will rot. Even the most delicious dishes, if you forget them in the back of the fridge, will mold. Yet, we make this dead food what we are! Our cells, blood, muscles, bones, hair, etc., are all from this ingested and digested food. No matter how much we eat, we will be hungry again, and the very act of eating starts the chemical process which will eventually wear out our bodies and cause them to expire. The only food available to mankind that is actually alive is a reversal of the Garden: In the Orthodox Church we view the Holy Altar (the space behind the icon screen) as an image of Paradise. Directly behind the Altar Table, the Tree of Life is planted (the Cross) upon which hangs the Fruit which gives life to the world (the broken Body and shed Blood of Christ as He hangs upon the Cross). The command from the same God Who walked in Paradise is now, ***“Take, eat: This is My Body broken for you and for the life of the world.” (Matthew 26:26)*** In receiving Holy Communion into our bodies, we do not make Christ what we are, for we are not stronger than God! He makes us *what He is* – and that is Divine, Holy, Beyond Death, Love Incarnate, and Joy in the Holy Spirit.

(Continued on Page 8)





Baptized into Christ: Na Mas Zisoun!

Michelle (Joey), daughter of Joshua and Audra Rosenthal, on February 6, 2021.
Godparent: Stephanie Rosenthal.

Barlaam (Gary) Kirchner (Adult Baptism) on February 13, 2021. Sponsor: Jonathan Harris.

Marriage: Na Zisete!

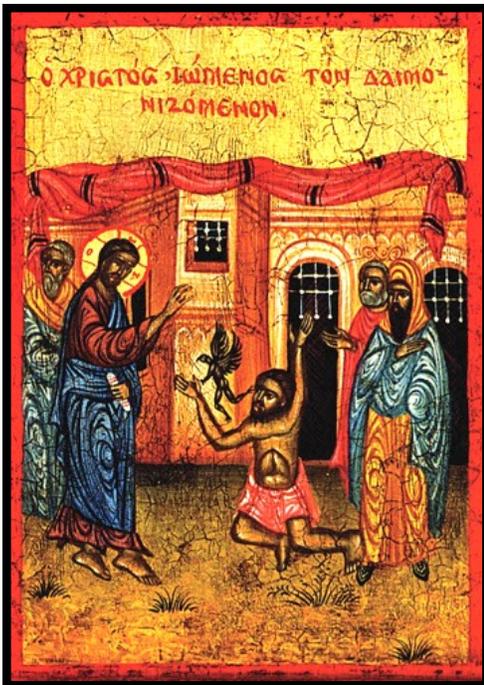
Joshua Rosenthal and Audra Petas on February 6, 2021.
Koumbara: Stephanie Rosenthal.

Fallen Asleep in the Lord

Louis Elias Hallis on December 30, 2020. Funeral on January 7, 2021.

Robert Anastasios Snowden on February 4, 2021. Funeral on February 12, 2021.

From Father Seraphim (Continued from Page 7)



Fasting really comes down to our love for God. We say we love Him, but if we cannot even give up a cheeseburger, it is a pretty weak love. Love always means sacrifice. We cry out to God in the language of asceticism (spiritual discipline). We can only be filled to the extent we are empty: After His Baptism, Christ Himself set the example of a 40-day fast (and it was total!) in the wilderness before encountering the devil. We also see the disciples ask Jesus, after He descended from the mountain of His Transfiguration, why they could not cast out a particularly powerful demon – to which He replied, *“This kind only comes out by prayer and fasting.”* (Mark 9:29) Prayer and fasting go together: St. John Chrysostom said, *“Why do you fast from beast and birds and devour your neighbor? The true fast is for the tongue to abstain from slander and the ear to fast from listening to gossip and the feet to fast from places of evil and the eye to fast from looking at what it should not.”*

The Church Fathers were like scientists who searched out and found the deeper meaning of so many things in the Scriptures and in the practical aspect of life lived according to the Gospel. They knew what we have also experienced: After a heavy meal, we want to sleep; we are weighed down and are certainly not going to do any serious

reflection or pray. As Christians we are called to be alert and awake, always ready to battle temptations and for the Second Coming of the Lord. The last thing we would want is to depart this life in a state of unreadiness. The Holy Fathers also recognized the connection between gluttony and sexual sins: This is why Step 15 in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (by St. John Climacos) is Gluttony and Step 16 is Lust, because they go hand in hand.

May we all be inspired to take the Lenten Fast seriously this year. May we strive, as best as we are able, to love God our Savior more than our stomachs, and come renewed and transformed to His Holy Resurrection.

With Love in Christ,

Father Seraphim

Stewardship and Community Outreach



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory be to God for all things! As we move through the Triodion toward Lent, we are reminded to practice increased fasting and prayer, continuous repentance for our sins, forgiveness toward those who have transgressed against us, Holy Confession, and increased charity toward others as well as our Parish. All of these lofty Lenten goals are commendable but there is one other element that is essential before these actions can truly affect our journey to salvation. That missing element is the greatest commandment and gift our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ gave us: LOVE!

As Jesus said to us, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind,”* and *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Matthew 22: 37-34) Additionally, St. John the Theologian wrote, *“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”* (1 John 4:8) St. John also wrote, *“God is love and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.”* (1 John 4:16)

What happens when we fail to love the Lord and our neighbor? St. Nicephoros teaches us that even if we should give away all of our wealth as alms, and surrender up our bodily members to fire and wild beasts, even for the sake of piety, and endure ten thousand other torments, the sacrifice of one who remembers wrongs would not be accepted by Christ. St. Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth: *“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”* (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

St. Gregory the Great taught that to “sanctify a fast is to show abstinence of the flesh and to be worthy of God by other good things being added.” St. Gregory continued: “To fast, then, by lifting up acts of almsgiving before His eyes, by doing what you do with LOVE of your neighbor, by being holy. What you take from yourself, give to someone else so that your needy neighbor’s body may be restored by the affliction of your own.” Regarding love through almsgiving, St. Leo said, “No act of devotion on the part of the faithful gives God more pleasure than that which is lavished on His poor.” Referring to Holy Confession, St. Augustine wrote, “Never assume that if we live good lives, we will be without sin; our lives should be praised only when we continue to beg for pardon” – that is, confess our sins.

Let us always remember that the greatest act and gift of LOVE of all time is the Incarnation, Passion, Death and Resurrection of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. At the Mystical Supper, He said, *“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”* (John 15:12-13) May we, as children of the loving God, focus all of our spiritual and physical activities, during this Lenten Season and throughout our lives, with LOVE toward God and one another. Let us always remember: *“Love never fails.”* (1 Corinthians 13:8)

In Christ, Stewardship and Outreach Committee



Adult Study with Father John and Father Seraphim:
Great Lent

Every Wednesday through March 10, 6:30 - 7:30 pm, in Kokkos Hall
We will wear face masks and practice social distancing



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): _____

With Gratitude to God for Our Pledged Stewards in 2021
If you wish to become a Parish Steward, please fill out Pledge Form and return to Karen

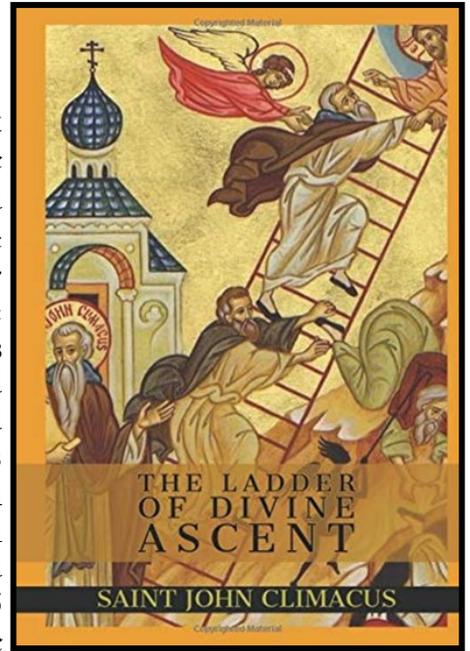
Acovino, Richard and Angela	Earl, Christine Michaelides	Kostas, James	Petrou, Jim and Penelopi
Adamy, Marina	Eliades, Aristotelis and Caroline	Kostopoulos, Georgia	Philippou, Demetrios and Luanne
Alford, Cynthia "Mary"	Eliades, Sia	Kountanis, Panagiota	Philoptochos Society
Alvarado, Jessie and Cokotis, Julie	Eliades, Harry and Agapi	Koutsulis, John and Eileen	Pierro, Joe and Rhonda
Anastasakis, Mark and Elaine	Eliades, Katerina	Koutsulis, Sam and Effie	Polimerou, Angeline
Anastasiou, Andrew and Kathleen	Eliakis, Varthie and LeeAnn	Kypreos, Peter and Geri	Politis, Pantelis and Dimitra
Andrews, Catherine	Eyler, Fr. Paul and Presv. Ilean	Kyriannis, Justin and Linda	Poulos, Christine
Andrews, Chris and Pamela	Eyler, John and Elizabeth	Lakkis, Christina	Pouridis, Kouli and Para
Andrews, George	Farren, Anthony and Maritsa	Lambros, Kyriakos and Mary	Powers, Russell and Rebecca
Andricopoulos, Margo	Fenlason, Nathan and Jennifer	Latelle, Penny	Punsalan, Basil and Sophie
Anthony, Stavros and Bernadette	Fischer, Cheryl	Lavine, Frederic	Ramos, Fr. Seraphim and Presv. Olenka
Arges, Dimitri	Fitzgerald, Norman and McCullen, Sandra	Lee, David and Alexandra	Raptis, Presv. Evonne
Aristides, George and Diana	Flangas, Gus and Tamara	Lekar, Michael and Effie	Rasmussen, Scott and Rebecca
Asim, Demetrious	Flangas, Marilyn	Leone, Stephen	Rigas, Anthony and Mary
Bacon, Ken and Dianne	Fletes, Richard and Herzig, Stephanie	Leonis, Nick and Sophia	Rigas, Evie
Balanos, Anastasia and Garyfalia	Foster, Kyle and Pierro, Maria Elena	Leonis, Tishe	Rihani, Gary and Linda
Balason, Voula	Frangakis, Christos and Anastasia	Leventis, Nicholas and Christina	Rivera, Elias and April
Balodimas, James	Gauvin, Chad and Marissa	Liaos, James and Tina	Rodis, Dimitri and Angie
Barbarino, Dee and Nick	Gekakis, George	Likourinou, Steve and June	Rosenthal, Joseph and Stephanie
Beeler, Mike and Carolyn	Ghebreaab, Daniel and Ghermay, Selam	Litsos, Nicholas and Catherine	Rotas, Beatrice
Berendji, Jim and Vivian	Gialketsis, William	Loney, Thomas and Chrysi	Ruffner, Skip and Kathy
Bieker, Adam and Cassie	Giouzelis, Anastasia	Malamatos, Kindina	Sakkas, Georgios and Stavropoulos, Bessie
Bjorklund, Danielle	Goodman, Robert and Linda	Maland, Donna	Salon, Janelle
Bledsoe, Lori	Gordon, Victor and Demetria	Manos, Constantine and Michele	Salonikis, Valentinos and Sophia
Booth, Alina	Gutierrez, Connie	Markakios, Sandy Kiriaki	Santamaria, Jennifer and Robert
Bratta, Georgene	Gutierrez, Daniel	Markantonis, George and Sarah	Savvas, Savva
Brennan, Peter and Maria	Hall, Elizabeth	Matsis, John and Rebecca	Sechrist, Carl and Christine
Britten, Ronald and Carol	Hamilton, Mary	Mavrantonis, Stacy and Kiki	Setian, Gary and Marie
Brown, Faye	Hamilton, Paul and Brandi	Mavros, Alex and Jen	Simpson, Bryan and Julie
Bruninga, Bill and Erin	Hastings, Teri	McManus, Jeanette	Sirhan, Michael and Khuri, Imtisal
Campbell, Theodore and Cheryl	Hemmers, Oliver and Pantelas, Anne	McKinney, Michael and Mersene	Skalkotos, Nikolas and Georgia
Carabas, Stephen and Linda	Hoadrea, Jimmy and Monci	McPherson, Robert and Marie	Smith, Kathleen
Carahalas, John and Constance	Hondros, Christina	McSweeney, Farolyn	Snow, Clifford and Christina
Caredis, Jon and Marjorie	Hondros, Christopher and Darlene	Menegatos, James	Snowden, Robert+ and Niki
Carrico, William and Alexandra	Hondros, Fr. John and Presv. Maria	Merritt, Devin and Sonia	Sparkuhl, Alex and Antoinette
Carter, Maria	Hondros, Marissa	Moffett, Todd and Eliopulos, Tina	Staub, Douglas and Anastasia
Chachas, Bessie	Houlis, Ila and Debbie	Monolakis, Anthony	Stavropoulos, Terry and Niki
Chachas, James	Howard, William and Willie	Monoyudis, Jim and Julie	Stenos, Louis
Chagares, Kiki	Iteen, Robert and Sophia	Moore, Brenda	Stransky, Jack and Rachel
Chamie, Elie, Emil and Claudine	Jensen, Matthew and Michelle	Murray, Christopher and George, Veneta	Stransky, Mark
Chandrinou, Alexia	Kachikis, Ernestine	Myers, Stella	Szukiewicz, Joseph and Justina
Chanos, Jennifer	Kakavulias, George and Helen	Neocleous, Plato	Tafoya, Steven and Irene
Chomakos, Dean and Tammy	Kambouris, Litsa	Newell, Ronald and Maria	Takas, Andrea
Chondrakis, Dimosthenis and Kragerud, Kaaren	Kanis, Constantinos and Katie	Nicholas, Christina	Tasios, Ramona and Pete
Christou, Toni	Karas, James	Nicholas, John and Estella	Theros, James and Kathryn
Collins, David	Karas, John and Marcie	Nixon, John and Ellyn	Thompson, Maggy
Conger, William and Alexia	Katsaros, Thomas and Sharon	Paikos, Tom and Elizabeth	Tohme, Tony and May
Costacos, John	Kelesis, Paula	Pajak, Scott and Angela	Tsirialidis, Kosmas and Katerina
Costuros, George and Marsha	Kinard, Panorea	Pandelis, Cheryl	Tzelalis, Steve
Cosulas, Fr. Basil and Presv. Samantha	Kirollos, Elhamy and Molina, Adriana	Panos, Jeanne	Tzelalis, Vaso
Cotsilis, Jenny	Kleanthis, George and Zanetta	Papalois, John and Maria	Wadlow, Nicholas and Pamela
Crist, Adam and Kanistra	Kolev, Plamen and Koleva, Slaveya	Papas, Christian and Nicole	Wainscott, Betty
Dalacas, Dimitri and Athanasia	Koliambas, Eleni	Papas, Peter and Rita	Wallace, Robert and Katerina
Deep, Joe and Schumacher, Alexi	Konsolakis, Eleni and Sophia	Pappas, Panagiotis and Andrea	Walter, Vernon and Alice
Demas, Spiro and Rita	Kontos, Diana	Pappas, Stella	Wells, Adrienne
Demoleas, Spero and Grace		Paschalis, Evangelos and Maria	Wilkerson, Chuck and Kristina
Demoleas, Stephanie		Payan, Luis and Eleni	Williams, Anthony and Anna
Dominguez, Eric and Amalia		Pendleton, Tricia	Wilson, Lori
Doskas, Athanasios and Anastasia		Pertsinides, Irene	
		Petersen, Todd and Diane	
		Petriuc, Constantin	
		Petro, Aleko and Georgia	

(Continued on Page 12)

Orthodox Bookstore

Greetings from the Bookstore!

Great Lent will soon be upon us and in many Orthodox monasteries this means that our featured selection, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, by Saint John Climacos, will once again be read aloud and contemplated during every meal in the *trapeza* (common refectory where the monks/nuns eat together) over the season. St. John was born in or around 579 and lived in the desert of Sinai. He often prayed in the Church built for the monks by the Emperor Justinian in 556-7 and is usually referred to as “John of the Ladder” after his book that was geared mainly toward the monastic community, but has been revered and read by faithful Orthodox Christians throughout the world ever since it was written. Generation after generation, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* has been passed down in many pious Orthodox families. A few decades ago an anthropologist in the Orthodoxy country of Romania was astonished when he observed that almost every household in Romania – over 95 percent – contained both the Holy Bible and *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Many years ago, St. John’s majestic work even migrated to this country with the Orthodox faithful who moved here. As a matter of fact, when the printing press was developed, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* was one of the first books ever published in America. This is how revered his work was.



Lay people like ourselves can also benefit from this widely popular classic of Eastern Christendom, in which the need for personal spiritual experience of the Christian is emphasized in stark contrast to a religion of doctrinal acceptance or rule following. The cultivation of humility and purity of heart, for example, are most strongly encouraged as St. John puts forward thirty steps of personal examination, observation, and guidance to assist in our spiritual pilgrimage or climbing of this “ladder.” Our upcoming journey from Lent to Pascha thus complements well, the spiritual objectives that St. John captures within the pages of what was “the most widely used handbook of the ascetic life in the ancient Greek Church” (Russell).

A brief summary and exhortation of St. John Climacos: “Ascend, my brothers, ascend eagerly. Let your heart’s resolve be to climb. Listen for the voice of the one who says: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of our God.’ (Isaiah 2:3) . . . Run, I beg you, run with him who said, ‘Let us hurry until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of God, at mature manhood, at the measure of the stature of Christ’s fullness.’ (Ephesians 4:13) Baptized in the thirtieth year of His earthly age, Christ attained the thirtieth step on the spiritual ladder, for God indeed is love, and to Him be praise, dominion, power. In Him is the cause, past, present, and future, of all that is good forever and ever. Amen.”

For your copy and to view or purchase icons, including our new icon of “The Ladder,” please continue to contact Karen during the week or email me at paraskevilv1971@gmail.com for a Sunday appointment.

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

Pledged Stewards 2021

Wilson, Steven and Cleo
Womack, Karl
Womack, Kimberly
Wronski, Chuck
Xerogiannes, Nick and Nikki

Yurkov, Andrea, Nikolina and Daniela
Zaferatos, Ted
Zarras, Nick and Chery
Zimmerman, Paul and Angela

See Pledge Form on Page 10!

*At the prayers, O Lord,
of all the Saints and
of the Theotokos,
grant us Your peace and
have mercy on us,
for You only are compassionate.*

Ministry News

Church School

Hi Everyone! Blessed Lent!

I hope we are all staying healthy and doing well in school. As there are still restrictions on Church gatherings, we are currently unable to offer Sunday Church School Classes for our younger students.

The weekly in-person *Teen Class on Great Lent*, taught by Father John and Father Seraphim, will continue *through Wednesday, March 10: Join your peers at 5:00 pm in Kokkos Hall!*

We continue to email on a weekly basis the *Children's Word Bulletin* as well as the *Orthodox Journeys* lesson plans for each grade level. Parents, I would like some feedback on how you and your children are enjoying these lessons; please email me at vivaleenie@cox.net. If you are not receiving these lessons, please contact Karen at the Church Office and she will put you on our email list.

I hope to see you all soon – if not in Church School, then in Church at the Liturgy.

In Christ, Eileen Koutsulis, Church School Director (702) 521-6516

Orthodox Family Fellowship & GOYA: Combined March Events

Blessed Lent! Kali Sarakosti! This month we will be having two events for all the GOYA and OFF ministries: One digital, and one in-person.

For the first event, we will have a Zoom Meeting, "Getting into Lent," *on Sunday, March 21 at 5:00 pm*. We will discuss the major themes and Sunday celebrations of this great period which leads up to Holy Week and Pascha, deepening our own understanding and Faith. A Zoom link will be emailed and text-blasted to all youth: If you are not receiving either email or text information from the Church regarding youth events and would like to be added to our distribution and contact lists, please let us know at frseraphim@vegasgreekorthodox.com.

Secondly, due to COVID restrictions, we will be combining and shortening our annual "Lenten Overnight Retreat" to a single afternoon event. *Come join us on Saturday, March 27 from 1:00 to 2:30 pm for a GOYA/OFF Mini-Lenten Retreat!* We will have the age groups divided, and do rotations offering the Sacrament of Holy Confession with Father John, a wonderful take-home craft, and classroom instruction. All sanitation and social distancing protocols will be followed. We will not be serving food, so please eat your Lenten breakfast or lunch *before* you arrive!

With questions or to volunteer, please contact Father Seraphim at the above email or (702) 768-7480. We hope to see you there!

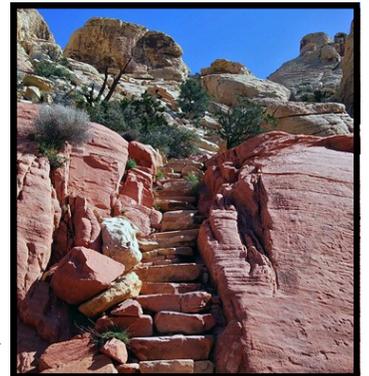
Love in Christ, Father Seraphim

Young Adults

As we enter into the 40-day journey of Great Lent, we would like to invite our Young Adults to also enjoy an outdoor journey in the great and beautiful Red Rock Canyon. Just as Jesus went into the wilderness of the desert while fasting for 40 days and nights, we can join Him in the rocky barrenness of our own preserved wilderness area just 20 minutes outside the city. We will gather directly after Church *on Sunday, March 21*, and head to the entrance of Red Rock Canyon *by 1:00 pm* to begin hiking the Calico Tanks Trail.

Beginning November 3, 2020, the Bureau of Land Management requires reservations for entry to the scenic drive of Red Rock Canyon between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm through May 31, 2021. Timed Entry reservations are available online, along with entry passes, and visitors with annual passes can enter their pass number at checkout. If you plan on joining us for our spiritual encounter with Christ in the desert, please make your reservation at: <https://www.recreation.gov/timed-entry/10075177>. We hope to see you there!

In Christ, Father Seraphim



Kokkos Scholarship

The Scholarship Committee for the Kokkos Scholarship Fund is pleased to announce that applications will be available at the Church Office *beginning on Monday, March 1*. If you wish to receive your application via email, please contact Karen at karen@vegasgreekorthodox.com. The applications must be returned *on or before Friday, April 16*. Late and/or incomplete applications will not be considered.

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

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

Note: The Kokkos Scholarships for 2020 have not yet been awarded due to the COVID shutdown. However, the applications are on file and will be reviewed. There will be two scholarships awarded from the 2020 applications in the amount of \$1,500 each, as well as two scholarships in 2021. For the applicants from last year, you are encouraged to once again apply in 2021.

AHEPA Las Vegas Chapter 314



Brothers: We are currently looking for Board Members to assist with the redevelopment of the Chapter. If you are interested in a Board Position or assisting with this very important organization please contact me.

On March 25, Greece will be celebrating its 200th Anniversary of Freedom from Ottoman Rule. AHEPA is excited to be part of the events, and encourage you to join. This Supreme Convention is celebrating our 99th Anniversary and will launch the countdown to our 100th Anniversary which will also be monumental. The convention will be held in Athens, Greece *from July 25 to 31*. More information is available at <https://ahepa.org/supreme-convention/>.

Due to our inability to host Fellowship at this time, we will not have a local celebration of Greek Independence Day.

AHEPA 314 is pleased to announce that it will once again offer a Scholarship for high school seniors entering college or current college undergraduate students. Information is available at <https://www.facebook.com/LVAHEPA314>. You can also request a copy of the application from Karen in the Church Office. The deadline for submissions is *April 3, 2021*.

You will also find a link to the Chapter website where you can make a donation to the Scholarship Fund or pay your dues. Please email us at ahepa314@gmail.com if you are interested in becoming involved with AHEPA.

Thank You, Steve Liaos, Acting President (702) 518-8018

“The Abbot Mathois said, ‘The nearer a man approaches to God, the greater sinner he sees himself to be. For the Prophet Isaiah saw God, and said that he was unclean and undone.’” (The Sayings of the Desert Fathers)

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST
GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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

Rev. Father John Hondros
frjohn@vegasgreekorthodox.com

Rev. Father Seraphim Ramos
frseraphim@vegasgreekorthodox.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.vegasgreekorthodox.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:
Fr. Seraphim

Greek Folk Dance: Sia Dalacas

Greek School: Paula Kelesis

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

Kali Parea: Demetrious 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

*Third Saturday of Souls:
St. Theodore and the Miracle of the Kollyva*

St. Theodore, who was from Amasia of Pontus, contested during the reign of Maximian (286-305). He was called Tyro, from the Latin *Tiro*, because he was a newly enlisted recruit. When it was reported that he was a Christian, he boldly confessed Christ; the ruler, hoping that he would repent, gave him time to consider the matter more completely and then give answer. Theodore gave answer by setting fire to the temple of Cybele, the "mother of the gods," and for this he suffered a martyr's death by fire.

Following his repose, St. Theodore became known for his wondrous miracle during the reign of Julian the Apostate. The pagan emperor Julian, knowing that Christians purify themselves during the first week of the Fast of Great Lent, planned to defile them especially at that time. Therefore, he secretly commanded that during those days the markets be filled with foods that had been defiled with the blood of animals offered in sacrifice to idols. But by divine command the Martyr Theodore appeared during sleep to Archbishop Eudoxios of Constantinople. The Saint revealed to him the tyrant's plan, then told him to call the faithful together immediately on Clean Monday, the First Day of Lent, and prevent them from purchasing those foods, but rather to make *kollyva* (boiled wheat) to supply their needs. Thus, the intent of the Apostate was brought to naught, and the pious people who were preserved undefiled for the whole of Clean Week, rendered thanks to the Martyr on the Saturday, and celebrated his commemoration with *kollyva*. This miracle took place in 362, and the Orthodox Church continues this commemoration each year to the glory of God and the honor of this Martyr.

St. Theodore the Recruit, the Great Martyr, is commemorated on February 12. His miracle of the *Kollyva* is commemorated on the First Saturday of Lent, on the Third Saturday of Souls.



*Apolytikion of First Saturday of Lent
(Second Tone)*

Great are the achievements of faith! In the fountain of flame, as by the water of rest, the holy Martyr Theodore rejoiced; for having been made a whole-burnt offering in the fire, he was offered as sweet bread unto the Trinity. By his prayers, O Christ God, save our souls.

LIGHTING A CANDLE FOR YOU:

Your Priests are 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.



**2021 Stewardship Report
(as of 2/23/21)**

Stewardship Gifts Pledged: \$312,671 (\$376,070 in 2020)
 Stewardship Gifts Received: \$130,567 (\$127,208 in 2020)
 Unfulfilled Pledge Balance: \$182,103 (\$248,862 in 2020)
 Stewardship Families Pledged: 247 (264 in 2020)
 Average Pledge to Date: \$1,266 (\$1,425 in 2020)
 2021 Budgeted Goal: \$500,000 ... Keep the Pledges Coming!

Church Account Summaries - January 2021

Nevada State Bank Accounts	December	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	January	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
General Operating Account (GOA)	\$28,542.26	\$311,873.83	\$1,527.14	\$63,463.88	\$81,033.00	\$197,446.35	
Community and Education (C&E)	\$1,673.17					\$1,673.17	
Greek Food Festival (GFF)	\$401.47	\$4,714.00		\$2,598.63	\$1,259.00	\$1,257.84	Purchase and sales of Post Festival Pastries
Designated, Restricted & Other (DR&O)	\$227,299.25	\$1,744.00	\$1,259.00	\$225.95	\$1,633.72	\$228,442.58	All expenses were for Bookstore merchandise and Bookstore merchant credit card fees.
Folk Dance Group	\$17,966.00					\$17,966.00	
Hellenic Historical Society	\$3,292.94					\$3,292.94	
Designated Funds	December	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	January	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Bookstore	\$7,597.38	\$1,744.00	\$1,259.00	\$225.95	\$1,633.72	\$8,740.71	
Ornaments	\$1,169.41					\$1,169.41	
Restricted Funds	December	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	January	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
ICON	\$140,376.44					\$140,376.44	
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					\$26,169.26	
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					\$3,041.22	
Altar Servers	\$440.00					\$440.00	
GOYA	\$142.36					\$142.36	
Designated, Restricted, and Other Total	\$227,299.25	\$1,744.00	\$1,259.00	\$225.95	\$1,633.72	\$228,442.58	
Other Funds	December	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	January	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Kokkos Scholarship Fund	\$78,372.33					\$78,372.33	

January 2021 Candles **\$5,325.00**
 January 2021 Trays **\$3,243.00**
Total January 2021 Candles & Trays \$8,568.00



MARCH 2021 ~ IN THE YEAR OF THE LORD

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

	1			3 5:00 pm Teen Class #5: Great Lent 6:30 pm Adult Study Class #5: Great Lent	4	5	6 1st Saturday of Souls 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial
7 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	8	9 The 40 Holy Martyrs of Sebaste 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy 6:00 pm Parish Council Meeting in Kokkos Hall	10 5:00 pm Teen Class #6: Great Lent 6:30 pm Adult Study Class #6: Great Lent	11	12	13 2nd Saturday of Souls 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial	
14 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy <i>Forgiveness Vespers follows Liturgy</i>	15 Lent Begins 6:00 pm Great Compline	16	17 6:00 pm Presanctified Liturgy	18	19 6:30 pm 1st Salutations to the Theotokos	20 3rd Saturday of Souls/St. Theodore 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial	
21 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy <i>Procession of Icons</i> 1:00 pm Young Adults Hike at Red Rock 5:00 pm GOYA/OFF Zoom	22 6:00 pm Great Compline	23 6:30 pm Philoptochos General Zoom Meeting	24 6:00 pm Great Vespers of the Annunciation	25 Annunciation of the Theotokos 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy	26 6:30 pm 2nd Salutations to the Theotokos	27 1:00 pm GOYA/OFF Mini-Lenten Retreat	
28 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	29 6:00 pm Great Compline	30	31 6:00 pm Presanctified Liturgy				

The Desert Messenger

*St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
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THE DESERT MESSENGER

The Way of the Lord

*Let us set out with joy upon
the season of the Fast, and prepare
ourselves for spiritual combat.*

*Let us purify our soul and
cleanse our flesh;*

and as we fast from food,

let us abstain also from every passion.

*Rejoicing in the virtues of the Spirit
may we persevere with love,*

and so be counted worthy to see

the solemn Passion of Christ our God,

and with great spiritual gladness

to behold His Holy Pascha.

(Forgiveness Vespers)

