

The Desert



Messenger

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

Volume 16, Issue 1 St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Las Vegas, NV

January 2018

**From
Father
John**

Beloved in Christ:

As we enter the New Year in the Lord, I am sure the majority of us are not inclined to thank God for how good things are – rather, we most likely are wondering just what catastrophic, tragic or perverse events await us in the upcoming year. Looking back at these past twelve months there is no doubt we are living in an off-balanced world that continues to spin out of control: Destructive hurricanes and fires, the threat of nuclear war, mass shootings – the worst which took place just three miles away from our Church – and startling sexual harassment and abuse cases involving high profile people which have given rise to the #MeToo movement.

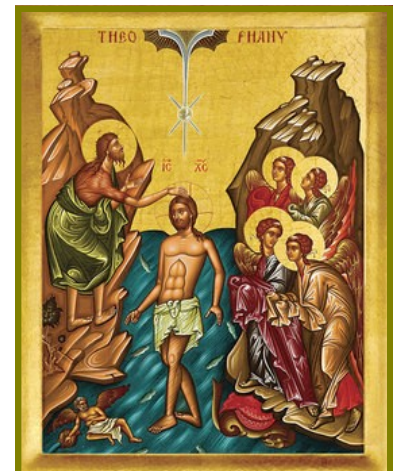
Although non-believers might be convinced that our Creator has given us all a flippant and uncaring “Bye, Felicia”, for those of us who hold strong to our faith we are assured – especially in this Holy Season of our Lord’s Nativity and Theophany – that indeed, God is with us! Holy Scriptures reveal that our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world when humanity was at its worst, far away from God, in the throes of debauchery and idolatry, of darkness and sin: *“The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.” (Matthew 4:16)* Yet even as the world was spiritually lethargic, God appeared as a light in the darkened world, illuminating those who desired to receive and follow Him – and He continues illuminating us today as we willingly *“walk as children of light,”* learning daily and doing *“what is pleasing to the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:8-10)*

The world today – as it was when Jesus walked the earth – is filled with evil, demonic possession, perversion, sickness, suffering, violence, wars and faithlessness: But Christ established His Church as a beacon of light in a fallen, dark world. With the New Year upon us, I pray that we may commend ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God – through daily prayer and reading of Holy Scriptures, continuous repentance and confession, frequently participating in the Divine Liturgy and receiving Holy Communion and, now more than ever, boldly professing our ancient Christian Faith with love in a world that so desperately needs spiritual enlightenment.

The New Year begins with a mini-holy week on *January 5, 6 and 7* as we celebrate Holy Theophany, commemorating the Baptism of Christ by the hands of St. John the Forerunner: Please make every effort to attend these services, for the Great Blessing and Sprinkling of Holy Water provides us an opportunity to renew our Baptism! It is also customary during the month of January to request your priests to come and bless your home and family, and even your business, bringing God’s sanctifying and protective grace in the place where you spend most of your time (please fill out and return the blessing request form on Page 6).

A Blessed New Year to You All - With Love in Christ,

Father John



WORSHIP SCHEDULE

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

Monday, January 1/*The Circumcision of Our Lord Jesus Christ/St. Basil the Great*

9:00 am Orthros

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

Epistle: Colossians 2:8-12

Gospel: Luke 2:20-21, 40-52

Friday, January 5/*Eve of Theophany (Strict Fast)*

8:00 am Royal Hours

9:00 am Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great

& Great Blessing of Water

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27

Gospel: Luke 3:1-18

Saturday, January 6/*Holy Theophany of Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ*

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

& Great Blessing of Water

Epistle: Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

Gospel: Matthew 3:13-17

6:00 pm Great Vespers of St. John the Baptist & Artoclasia (Kakavulias)

Sunday, January 7/*Synaxis of St. John the Baptist: Our Parish Feast Day*

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy

Orthros: Tone Six (Second Plagal)

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

Epistle: Acts 19:1-8

Gospel: John 1:29-34

Parish Council Oath of Office

Cutting of the Community Vasilopita

Parish Name Day Luncheon & FDF Preview

Sunday, January 14/*Leave-taking of Theophany/*

The Holy Fathers Martyred at Sinai and Raitho

Orthros: Tone Seven (Grave)

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): John 21:1-14

Epistle: Ephesians 4:7-13

Gospel: Matthew 4:12-17

Wednesday, January 17/*St. Anthony the Great*

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy

Epistle: Hebrews 13:17-21

Gospel: Luke 6:17-23

Sunday, January 21/*15th Sunday of Luke/Zaccheos Sunday/St. Maximos the Confessor*

Orthros: Tone Eight (Fourth Plagal)

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): John 21:14-25

Epistle: 1 Timothy 4:9-15

Gospel: Luke 19:1-10

Wednesday, January 24

5:00 pm Orthros

6:00 pm Divine Liturgy (St. Gregory the Theologian)

Epistle: Hebrews 7:26-28; 8:1-2

Gospel: John 10:9-16

Thursday, January 25/*St. Gregory the Theologian (Celebrated preceding evening)*

Sunday, January 28/*16th Sunday of Luke/Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee/Triodion Begins/St. Ephraim the Syrian*

Orthros: Tone One

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

Epistle: 2 Timothy 3:10-15

Gospel: Luke 18:10-14



Adult Study with Father John

*The Hymns, Readings and Prayers
of Holy Theophany*

*Meets Every Wednesday Starting January 10, 2018
7:00 - 8:30 pm in the Church*

SUNDAY SCHEDULE

JANUARY 7: COMMUNITY VASILOPITA & NAME DAY LUNCHEON

Ushers: Gus Flangas, Mike Beeler, Bessie Stavropoulos, George Bochanis, Demetrious Asim
and John Nicholas

Fellowship: St. John the Baptist Name Day Luncheon & FDF Preview Performance

JANUARY 14

Ushers: Demetrious Asim, John Matsis, Mark Karris, Stacy Mavrantonis, Justina Szukiewicz
and John Koutsulis

Memorial: Grigorios Tyrovolis (6 months)

Fellowship: Pan Arcadians

JANUARY 21: PHILOPTOCHOS MEMBERSHIP FELLOWSHIP

Ushers: Adam Bieker, George Bochanis, Gus Flangas, Bessie Stavropoulos, John Nicholas
and Mike Beeler

Fellowship: Ladies Philoptochos Society

JANUARY 28

Ushers: Justina Szukiewicz, John Koutsulis, Adam Bieker, Stacy Mavrantonis, Mark Karris
and John Matsis

Fellowship: Forerunners - The Seniors of St. John the Baptist

Please join us for . . .

St. John the Baptist Name Day Luncheon & FDF Preview Performance by Our Folk Dancers Sunday, January 7, 2018

*Following Divine Liturgy & the Vasilopita Cutting
Panos Hall*

*Menu: Greek Salad, Chicken Gyro with Tzatziki,
Greek Fries, Dessert & Coffee ~ Cash Bar*

*\$15 per Person ~ Benefits St. John the Baptist Greek Folk Dance Ministry
Please be generous!*

*Purchase your tickets on Sundays from Parish Council and Dance Board Members
and on Weekdays from Karen at the Church Office*



Parish Council Report

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

As we come to the end of the year and enjoy the Christmas Holidays, it is time to be thankful for all the blessings bestowed upon us and our Church Community. We sincerely hope that your holidays are filled with happiness and laughter and in the upcoming year, may God bless you and keep you protected and in good health.

As we move forward into 2018, it is important to remember the many blessings we have received and to thoughtfully look toward "Giving Back." The primary step in "Giving Back" is through Stewardship of our time, talents and treasures. Stewardship is the key to the operation of the Church: It provides us with a place to worship in our Faith, a place to enjoy and participate in the Sacraments, a place to enjoy Fellowship, a place to enjoy and participate in the Ministries, and a place to have a sense of Community. As you reflect on your Stewardship Pledge, please pray and look into your heart, and contribute not only with time and talents, but also your treasures. It takes contributions from everyone to keep our Church going.

We just had our Parish Council Elections and we want to thank all those who ran for a seat on the council. We had eleven people running for the six available positions on the council. This was really great to see because it clearly shows that more and more people are becoming involved in the many facets of our Church and we certainly hope this trend continues. The six elected Parish Council Members include Bessie Stavropoulos, Stacy Mavrantonis, Adam Bieker, John Nicholas, John Matsis and myself, Gus Flangas. We would also like to thank and acknowledge Skip Ruffner, Kouli Pouridis and Pete Tsois for their many contributions and selfless hours they gave as Council Members. We really appreciate their service and look forward to working them on other projects in the coming year.



We recently had our annual Stewardship All-Stars Luncheon to kick off our 2018 Stewardship Commitment Drive and to honor three individuals who have contributed significantly to our Church over the years. It was nice event and well attended. This year we were privileged to honor and show our appreciation to three amazing women – Ramona Tasios, Kiki Mavrantonis and Sophia Leonis – for all they have done and continue to do.

Please keep in mind that we have the St. John the Baptist Name Day Luncheon scheduled for ***Sunday, January 7, 2018***, immediately following the Liturgy. The proceeds from the event will benefit our Folk Dance Ministry, to help our youth participate in the Dance Competition at the Faith Dance Fellowship (FDF) event in San Francisco. FDF is an extremely important event for our young people, so please attend and support them in their endeavors and enjoy the dancing exhibitions they will be performing at the Luncheon. We look forward to seeing you all there.

Pertaining to the Iconography, there has been little change over last month. We have submitted all the necessary paperwork for our 501(c)(3) designation. As stated last month, it will take several months for the IRS to approve us even on expedited basis. Once we are approved, we will again work with the US Immigration Services to get approval for the Iconographers to come to Las Vegas and finish their work. We will continue to keep everyone informed of any developments. Please do not hesitate to ask if you have any specific questions.

At the time of the writing of this article, the Parish Council unanimously approved to have the parking lot repaired, resurfaced and re-striped. This should be done by the end of December, weather permitting. Please do not step on or drive in roped off areas.

In closing, we want to again thank the various Church ministries and organizations, and the many individuals for all the work they do and have done to help us secure the future of the Church for ourselves and most importantly, our children. It clearly takes a lot of work from the entire community to maintain our Church. Please step forward whenever you can and get involved to help us make our Parish better.

Have a Blessed Christmas and New Year! Gus Flangas, Parish Council President

Philoptochos News

Dear Ladies of Philoptochos,

Another fresh New Year is here! Another year to live . . . to banish worry, doubt and fear . . . to love, laugh and give!



Christmas Pastry Sale: This year we prepared 800 packages of delicious Greek pastries. The pastry boxes turned out beautiful with different colored ribbons and ornaments. A special thank you to Christmas Pastry committee members Amanda Flangas, Tamara Flangas, Bernadette Anthony, Dora Hart, Geri Kypreos and Donna Maland. We sold all the pastries and we are grateful to all our volunteers – men, women and children – who came and helped with baking, packaging and decorating. And thanks to all those who purchased them! It was a group effort in an atmosphere with wonderful energy and love.



Annual Christmas Party: The Philoptochos Christmas Party was held at Maggiano's Little Italy Restaurant at the Fashion Show Mall. It was a beautiful event, with 50 women and a few men in attendance. The room was filled with laughter, Christmas spirit, fellowship and love. Our hostess, Jelena Boskovic, invited a very talented violinist, Dejana Roth, and keyboard player, Pete Sprague, who played beautiful music.

We were also very happy to have Robert Youshok as Santa Claus, who spent the evening greeting, delivering all the gifts, and taking pictures with each and every one of us. We collected donations for Smith's gift cards that will be given to the people in need in our community. I would like to express our appreciation to Jelena for being our gracious chairwoman and to her wonderful daughter, Vasilija, for her participation and enthusiasm.



December Fellowship: Thank you to our hostesses, Benita Beeman and Jennifer Santamaria, and all the ladies who participated and helped with the Fellowship.

St. John Community Christmas Card: Over 130 people participated in the Community Christmas Card this year, which will be mailed to each and every family in our community. Our appreciation to Andrea Takas who once again chaired this wonderful project, and to Bill Bruninga for his photography and Bessie Stavropoulos for her design.

Below are our January events:

● **Theophany Fellowship on Saturday, January 6, 2018:** Geri Kypreos and Cheryl Pandelis will host Fellowship immediately after the Holy Theophany Divine Liturgy and Great Blessing of the Water.

● **Community Vasilopita on Sunday, January 7:** In celebration of St. Basil, Philoptochos provides large Vasilopites, made by Dora Hart, with a coin in each loaf. Father John will bless and cut the sweet bread in Church and distribute pieces to the congregation, and the recipients are asked to make a monetary donation in support of St. Basil's Academy.

● **General Meeting on Tuesday, January 9 at 6:00 pm:** This will be the first General Meeting for 2018; a light dinner will be served.

● **Membership Drive Fellowship on Sunday, January 21:** In 2017 we had 111 members and we already have several new pledges for 2018. Let's keep growing our amazing organization. We need to empower our small army of ladies to continue helping the poor, the hungry, the aged, the sick, the unemployed, the orphaned, those with disabilities and the victims of disasters.

As we celebrate the glorious Feast of the Nativity, I would like to express my gratitude to our wonderful board, our chairwomen, and all our members for their efforts, time, donations and participation to make our Philoptochos programs, projects and events a success.

I wish you and your families a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

With Love in Christ, Vicky Palivos, Philoptochos President

Hosting Fellowship January 21, 2018
The Ladies Philoptochos Society
Panagia Chapter
honors and welcomes all new members.

*As Greek Orthodox Christian Women
we are provided the opportunity to participate in Christ's work here on earth.
Please join and become a
"Friend of the Poor."*



*Joyful and
Triumphant!*

*Christmas
Pageant
2017*

REQUEST FOR HOUSE OR BUSINESS BLESSING

Name _____ Phone (____) _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip _____ Email _____

Please return the completed form to Father John or Karen. We will contact you to schedule!

For the blessing, please have bowl of bottled water, a sprig of basil or rosemary, an icon and votive candle.

From Father Seraphim

It is no small thing to honor and supplicate the Patron Saint of our Parish. Every year on *January 7*, here in Las Vegas we take time out of our busy lives to come together and stand before God in the Church, asking for the protection and presence of St. John the Baptist in our lives and in our community. Moreover, we supplicate the Forerunner in every Liturgy as we sing his hymn, in the spirit of a “fight song.”

The theme of our Greek Food Festival this year was: “A Voice in the Desert.” These words are inspired by *Isaiah 40:3* and were written as a prophecy of the life and ministry of our Patron Saint – the Forerunner of Christ. A voice in the desert is a puzzling thing, which can lead one to ask, “If a voice cries out in the wilderness, does it really make a sound?” Phrased another way: “What is the purpose of a voice that no one may hear?” People live in cities, not deserts! It is an easy lie to believe that that the things we do in secret have no effect on what happens in the open. It was, however, the thirty undocumented years of St. John’s life in the wilderness that were of outmost importance both then and today.



From his childhood St. John miraculously lived in the desert under the harshest of conditions. Our tradition teaches that he was taken care of mystically by angels, yet at the same time we know that he lived simply and ascetically. His intake of food was minimal, he lacked shelter and was clothed in camel’s hair. (*Matthew 3:4*) Of the Saint’s years in the desert, St. Nikolai Velimirovich writes: “Thirty years of fasting and silence! This, not even the mountain beasts can endure. The lion alleviates his hunger with the music of roaring . . . you did not roar nor moan, neither your lament nor your song through the wilderness echoed!” The voice in the desert was not crying out complaints, nor did a lament accompany St. John in his wandering in the wilderness. The voice was inaudible to the ear because it was a cry of the soul, a continuous prayer and longing for God.

We know that St. John had a relationship with the living God during his time in the wilderness: We even know that he experienced a form of dialogue with the Lord, for scripture says, “*The Word of God came to John*” (*Luke 3:2*), and John himself reveals, “. . . *the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’*” (*John 1:32-33*) As St. John and God had a direct line of communication and in the heart, we can trust in the validity of his recognition of Jesus Christ as the Messiah as well as his teachings of repentance. Thus the voice in the wilderness is both the silent prayer of St. John and voice of God Himself speaking through his servant.

Each and every one of us should want to imitate St. John the Baptist. It seems, however, that in order to be able to be the voice of the Word in today’s world, we must first be silent. For thirty years the powerful voice of St. John was in the wilderness, and all that time he was *silently* preparing to begin his preaching. Likewise, Christ had a quiet and undocumented first thirty years in the world, and then spent forty days in the wilderness, crying out only to His Father before He opened His mouth and began both preaching and working miracles. We are called to live no differently, entering into the “*barren and untrodden*” (*Psalms 63:1*) wilderness of our hearts and once there, silently praying the Jesus Prayer. Just as important, in that desert within us we are called to listen for the Lord’s voice and will for our lives.

Finally, like St. John, we should allow ourselves to be prepared when a hardship arises – enduring with faith and spreading the comforting message of Christ to those also afflicted. Here within the desert of Las Vegas we can be the voice in the wilderness of the human heart today, which cries out to God and through which Christ speaks.

With Love in Christ,

Father Seraphim

Youth and Family Ministries

Church School

I hope everyone is enjoying the wonderful Christmas holiday with family. The Christmas Pageant was very sweet as usual. What a special tradition we have! We are so blessed to have our children participate and for our Parish to be able to enjoy this in our beautiful Church. Thank you, Presvytera Maria, for all your hard work. You are such a shining star!

Please continue to register your children for Church School. It is important to have a registration on record for each of our students. The forms are on the bulletin boards and can be given to me or your child's teacher on Sundays, or to Karen during the week.

There will be no Church School on *Sunday,*

January 7 – we are encouraging families to worship together on our Parish Feast Day and enjoy the Community Vasilopita, and then the Folk Dance Performance at the Name Day Luncheon. We wish our children well at FDF!

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

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



Youth Choir News



Happy New Year! May 2018 be blessed for all our Youth Choir Members and their families!

We are changing up our schedule for January: As several of our members will be attending the Folk Dance Festival in San Francisco, we will not chant on the second Sunday; rather, we will chant the Divine Liturgy on the *third Sunday, January 21*. We will not have practice this month.

We wish all our Folk Dancers well at FDF.

Love in Christ, Presvytera Maria

Moms & Tots



Christ is Born! What a blessing last month brought us! We had the pleasure of Father Seraphim getting “down low” to our tots’ level and explaining the Nativity of Christ through show-and-tell of the Church Dome Iconography. We pray you all have a very Merry Christmas as we celebrate the Birth of our Lord with family and loved ones.

We cannot wait to celebrate the Baptism of our Lord this month and hope to see you all at the beautiful and mysterious service of *Theophany – Liturgy and the Great Blessing of the Waters – on January 6*.

Our next Moms & Tots meeting will be on *Tuesday, January 9 at 10:30 am* inside Church for prayer and then continuing for discussion and playtime in the Panos Hall Foyer.

A very Happy New Year to all!

In Christ, Cassie Bieker

Greek Folk Dance

Happy New Year! Our *Parish Name Day Luncheon and Folk Dance Preview* is set for *Sunday, January 7*. We are looking forward to showcasing all our hard work over the last several months. Please come to the Luncheon (see flyer on Page 3), sponsored by the Parish Council and Folk Dance Ministry, and support our dancers.

We will all be heading to San Francisco on *January 11-15*, to participate with the thousands of other youth from our Metropolis in the Folk Dance Festival. We are excited to take part in this wonderful event. Wish us luck! Again, our many thanks for all the support from our families and the community.

With Much Gratitude, the Folk Dance Board

Orthodox Family Fellowship

Dear Families of St. John the Baptist,

We wish you a peaceful New Year! We had a wonderful time at the Ethel M. Chocolate Factory in December, where a large group came out to enjoy the lights and delights. Our next event is *Sunday, January 28 from 1:00 to 3:00 pm at the Las Vegas Ice Center (9295 W. Flamingo Road, Suite 130, Las Vegas)*. We will meet at the ice rink after Divine Liturgy and Fellowship. Skate rental is \$10 for two hours, but for children 5 and under the cost is \$6. Come and join us for some fun, exercise, and good company.

Jelena Boskovic and Amy Khuri, OFF Advisors

GOYA ~ For Teenagers

We had a very busy month of activity in December! Our GOYAnS revived a beautiful tradition and decorated our St. John the Baptist Parish Christmas Tree in Panos Hall: A huge thank you for all those who came and put in many hours of hard work! God bless you! Then we gave back and volunteered our time at ThreeSquare Food Bank, packaging food for those in need. Our GOYAnS are now looking forward to a wonderful time at the Likourinou home celebrating our Lord's Nativity at our Annual Christmas Party on *Saturday, December 30 at 4:00 pm* – please RSVP with Father Seraphim.

The time has come to take the exquisite decorations down, so join us for GOYA Night on *Sunday, January 7 at 5:30 pm*. After dinner and a discussion, we will work together to quickly and carefully pack the tree away so we can enjoy some fun and games. Later on in the month we will enjoy ice skating together on *Sunday, January 28 from 1:00 to 3:00 pm at the Las Vegas Ice Center Las Vegas Ice Center (9295 W. Flamingo Road, Suite 130, Las Vegas)*. We will meet at the ice rink after Divine Liturgy and Fellowship. Skate rental is \$10 for two hours.

Blessed New Year! June Likourinou and Kouli Pouridis, GOYA Advisors



Greek Language Classes



The kids had a fun Christmas Party and book exchange on the last day of the first semester of Greek School. We will resume classes on *Tuesday, January 9*.

I have an urgent need for a teacher to teach the 4-7 year-old class; if we do not have a teacher, that age group will unfortunately be without a class. If you are interested, please contact me at (702) 249-4740.

Καλη Χρονια! Paula Kelesis, Director

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

Adult and Young Adult Ministries

Young Adults

Happy New Year, Young Adults!

We are looking forward to the beautiful Christmas Party hosted by Niko Asim on *Friday, December 29 at 6:00 pm* – please RSVP with Niko or Father Seraphim.

For January, please join us on *Thursday, January 4, 2018*, for an awesome event: Ice Skating at the *Cosmopolitan Hotel and Casino (3708 Las Vegas Boulevard South)*. The Cosmo has a state-of-the-art 4,200 square foot ice rink on the roof of the hotel – ranked in the top ten ice-skating rinks in the nation!

Before ice-skating we will have a wonderful meal together outside by the fire pits, also located on the hotel roof. Please bring your local ID, as you will receive a discount, bringing the total from \$20 to \$10 for rink access and skate rental. If you would like to car-pool, arrive at the Church grounds *no later than 5:45 pm*, as we will depart at 6:00 pm sharp! We are car-pooling to save on parking fees – we are asking all ride-sharers to split the cost on parking.

We look forward to seeing you at both events!

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

Mr. & Mrs. - A Couples Fellowship

We extend a heartfelt thank you to Mary and Paisios (Rob) Pursell for hosting us in December. The fasting Mexican-themed food was as delicious to our bodies as the uplifting music – provided by the Pursells and the Folk Dance Carolers – was good to our hearts!



This month we will meet at Mike and Effie Lekar's home on *Saturday, January 20 at 6:00 pm* for dinner, spiritual discussion and fellowship. Please RSVP with Father Seraphim for directions and to let us know what dish you will bring to share.

God's Blessings in the New Year!

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

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

Happy New Year! We look forward to wonderful time at the home of Demetri Asim for our Christmas Party on *Wednesday, December 27 at 6:00 pm* – please RSVP with Demetri and bring a gift valued at no more than \$5.

For January, Kali Parea is coming together to have dinner and watch a movie on *Saturday, January 13*. We will eat dinner at *5:00 pm at Eclipse Theatre (814 South Third St. Las Vegas)* and afterwards watch *The Greatest Showman* about P.T. Barnum who founded the Barnum & Bailey Circus and invented show business. We look forward to seeing you there!

Demetrious Asim, Advisor

Daughters of Penelope

Dear Parishioners:

The Daughters of Penelope thank you for your generous donations on November 26 for Father John's Discretionary Fund, benefitting those in need in our community. We collected \$1,200 for this worthy cause.

Have a Healthy and Happy New Year.

With Love in Christ, Kathy Pentogenis, President



"Today the nature of the waters is sanctified . . ."

Forerunners - The Seniors of St. John the Baptist

A Blessed and Joyous New Year to All! May 2018 bring us peace, joy, happiness, love and good health. In 2017 we had good moments, funny ones, sad ones, and many memories.

Our Christmas Party in December was well attended, and we all enjoyed the delicious meal that our Master Chef, Sam Koutsulis, and his crew prepared for us. We also enjoyed our dear Santa Claus (Nick Katris) who presented us with lovely gifts from our gift exchange. There were also many super gifts from our raffle. We sang Christmas songs and played bingo.

Our January gathering will not take place, as usual, early in the month. The Forerunners will have its lunch and fellowship on **Monday, January 22 at 11:30 am**. We look forward to seeing all of you there. If you have not been to any of our luncheon gatherings, it is time you join us – we are a special group of people.

Now I must bring up a very serious matter. Our great leaders, Marie and Gary Setian, need to retire this year. We need someone (or two) to step up to the plate and take over the reins. It would be very sad to see our Seniors ministry dissolved due to a lack of leadership. We realize that there are some who assist but do not drive – but there are those who drive and can offer the service to this ministry that is needed for its continuation. PLEASE HELP US.

We never forget our Seniors in hospitals, facilities or home bound – we have them in our thoughts and prayers.

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

Adult Basketball



Join us for a pick-up basketball game *every Monday evening (except for holidays) from 7:00 to 9:00 pm in Panos Hall*. Please call *George Chomakos at (702) 523-8675* to be added to the basketball email list.

Notes from the Choir Loft

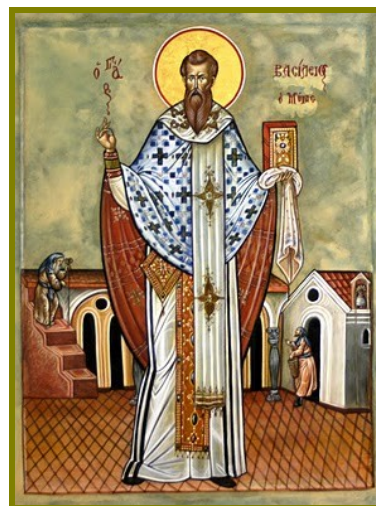


Happy New Year! Thank You to the Choir members for offering your voices for the Christmas Eve Liturgy and Great Vespers.

We hope to continue to gain new Choir members this year. We strongly encourage all Youth Choir members to join us every Sunday in the Choir Loft. If you need any assistance with the music, please let me know and we can arrange a time!

Athena Mertes, Choir Director

“Sing praises to the Lord.” (Psalm 30:4)



Let's start the New Year in Christ...

Please join us for the Divine Liturgy on Monday, January 1 at 10:00 am

2017 Stewardship Report (as of 12/20/17)

Stewardship Gifts Pledged: \$382,853 (\$400,948 total in 2016)

Stewardship Gifts Received: \$351,491

Unfulfilled Pledge Balance: \$31,362

Stewardship Families Pledged: 435 (443 total in 2016)

Average Pledge to Date: \$880 (\$905 in 2016)

Stewardship and Community Outreach

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

May the Lord bless each and every one of you in this new calendar year. About this time of year, many of us make wonderful heartfelt resolutions to change our life and our ways. What do we resolve to do each year? Lose weight, get in better physical shape, quit smoking, drink less alcohol, be smarter with our money, eat healthier, volunteer, spend less time on social media, or improve a relationship.

How many of us look at the development of our New Year's Resolutions and think first of His Church? How many of our New Year's Resolutions focus on a commitment to attend more Church services, offer more of our time to the Lord and His Church by offering our talents to support the mission of spreading the Good News and taking care of our brothers and sisters, all of whom are made in His image and likeness? How many of us set aside the first fruits of our labor to give back to God that which he has bestowed upon us, that which He wants us to voluntarily use to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, take in strangers, clothe those in need, visit the sick, and those in prison? (*Matthew 25:35-36*) Is giving our time, talents, and treasures part of our New Year's Resolutions and worthy of our calling as Orthodox Christians? As St. Paul wrote, *"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called."* (*Ephesians 4:1*)

What does it mean to be called? Who called us? We were called by Jesus Christ. He called us. He chose us. Through many and various means, He got us to St. John Church, worshipping Him. We were called. We heard His voice, and we came. And what were we called to? St. Paul explains: *"There is one Body, and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, in you all."* (*Ephesians 4:5-6*)

Our calling is the "one hope," which is expressed by our one Lord, one Faith, and one Baptism. St. Paul goes on to explain that to *"each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."* (*Ephesians 4:7*) The giving of grace means the gifts we were given by God, specifically our time, talents, and treasures. We all have the same calling but it is expressed differently in each person by the different gifts received. Again, we need to ask ourselves: Is our offering of time, talents, and treasures worthy of our calling as Orthodox Christians? If we are not walking worthily of His calling, are we really opening ourselves up to the grace of God that saves us?

When our Parish leadership calls for us to donate our time to ministry and fund raising events, are we responding with love? Do we offer our talents back to God by offering them to our Parish to help reduce the costs of maintaining our beautiful spiritual campus? Do we truly give consideration to returning the first fruits of our labor to God? The realities of our Parish show that many of us do not.

If we truly gave back the first fruits of our labor to support the Lord's mission in this world, then our Church would not struggle financially year in and year out. Imagine for a moment what it might look like if we all gave 10 percent, a tithe. Clearly, some of our Parishioners cannot – and God bless them for returning of the first fruits of their labor! However, many of us could give back 10 percent and more. Sadly, those that can, do not. But what if most of us did?

Do you know that the median income in the greater Las Vegas area is \$58,432. If the 433 steward families could average giving back to the Lord the tithe of their first fruits, the Parish would see a revenue stream of \$2,530,106. If we gave back but five percent, or \$1,265,053 of the first fruits of our labor, the revenue stream would still exceed the basic operating costs of our Parish and enable us to pour more back into ministries, and our other long-range goals. Today, the average giving in our Parish is \$862, less than 1.5 percent of Las Vegas' median income.

In this New Year may we all feel the Lord's love for us and may our walk be worthy of His calling.
In Christ, St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church Stewardship Committee



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

FESTIVAL FAVORITES SALE

NOVEMBER 16 - DECEMBER 30 ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Las Vegas Greek Food Festival is making five of the guests' favorite Greek dishes so you can order and pick up from November 16 to December 30. All items excluding Vasilopita Bread are frozen in a 10" x 13" oven safe tray. Minimal preparation is required with simple instructions included. Items will be available for pick up at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church.

 <p>12 servings of SPANAKOPITA \$20</p>	 <p>12 servings of TIROPITA \$20</p>
 <p>6 servings of PASTITSIO \$25</p>	 <p>12 servings of BOUGATSA \$25</p>
 <p>1 loaf of VASILOPITA \$18</p>	<p>NEW YEARS TRADITION</p> <p>Vasilopita is a traditional Greek bread prepared with a coin baked inside. On New Year's Day, the bread is cut and whoever receives the slice containing the coin is blessed for the New Year. Our boxed Vasilopita includes an insert detailing it's historic meaning in depth. For \$15, you can receive a loaf without the insert and box.</p>

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Las Vegas, NV 89118

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Rev. Father Seraphim Ramos
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Maintenance & Grounds

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Parish Council: Gus Flangas

Philoptochos: Vicky Palivos

Stewardship & Community Outreach:
Justina Szukiewicz

Choir: Athena Mertes

Chanters & Youth Choir:
Presvytera Maria Hondros

Church School: Eileen Koutsulis

Altar Servers: Alex & Eric Szukiewicz

GOYA:
Kouli Pouridis & June Likourinou

Orthodox Family Fellowship:
Jelena Boskovic & Amy Khuri

Moms & Tots:
Cassie Bieker

Young Adults:
Nicholas Asim & Fani Mavrantonis

Greek Folk Dance: Sia Dalacas

Greek School: Paula Kelesis

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

Kali Parea: Demetrios Asim

Adult Basketball: George Chomakos

Forerunners: Marie & Gary Setian

Orthodox Bookstore:
Constantine Frangakis

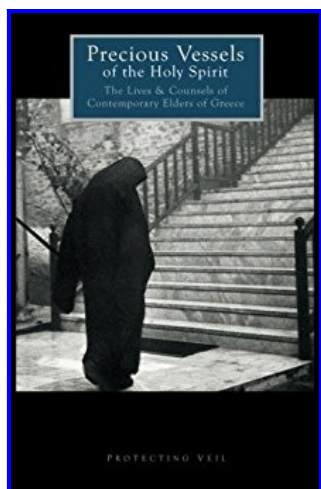
Greek Food Festival: Gus Flangas

Hellenic Historical Society:
Cheryl Pandelis and Susan Stamis

Photography: Bill Bruninga

Orthodox Bookstore

Happy New Year from the Bookstore!



This month we are featuring *Precious Vessels of the Holy Spirit: The Lives and Counsels of Contemporary Elders of Greece*.

From Elder Epiphanius:

“Sadness purifies us. Man is truly man in sadness. In joy he is changed, he becomes someone else. In sadness he becomes that which he truly is. And this is the way, par excellence, that he approaches God. He senses his weakness. Many times, when he is in glory and joy, he feels that he is the ‘eye of the earth’ or, if you prefer, the center of the universe: ‘I am, and nobody else!’ In pain and sadness he feels like an insignificant ant in the universe, that he is completely dependent, and he seeks the help and companionship of God.

Those of us who have passed through pains, either psychical or physical, know that we never prayed as hard and with such quality and length, as we did when we were in the bed of pain or when some heavy psychical sadness tested us.

While, when we have everything, we forget prayer and fasting, and many things. It is for this reason that God allows pain.”

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

Church Account Summaries ~ November 2017

Nevada State Bank Accounts	October	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	November	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
General Operating Account (GOA)	\$15,775.69	\$24,037.33	\$11,349.00	\$7,469.43	\$43,405.80	\$286.79	
Community and Education (C&E)	\$3,251.51			\$1,000.00		\$2,251.51	
Greek Food Festival (GFF)	\$199,203.35			\$106,420.17	\$3,578.95	\$89,204.23	
Designated, Restricted & Other (DR&O)	\$300,585.04	\$650.00		\$124.41		\$301,110.63	
Folk Dance Group	\$12,541.65	\$924.00				\$13,465.65	
Mortgage Account	\$57,338.08				\$5,201.14	\$52,136.94	
Designated Funds	October	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	November	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Bookstore	\$8,823.95			\$124.41		\$8,699.54	
Ornaments	\$1,077.41					\$1,077.41	
Restricted Funds	October	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	November	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
ICON	\$272,720.46	\$650.00				\$273,370.46	Iconography In Memory
Library Account	\$1,470.77					\$1,470.77	Account owed \$21,000. Funds used to make payroll and pay bills in 2015
Giving Tree	\$4,450.91					\$4,450.91	
Building Fund	\$7,710.61					\$7,710.61	
Youth Choir	\$3,069.82					\$3,069.82	
Church School	\$1,306.37					\$1,306.37	
Misc. D & R Deductions	-\$535.26					-\$535.26	
Altar Servers	\$440.00					\$440.00	
GOYA	\$50.00					\$50.00	
Designated, Restricted, and Other Total	\$300,585.04	\$650.00	\$0.00	\$124.41	\$0.00	\$301,110.63	
Other Funds	October	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	November	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Kokkos Scholarship Fund	\$55,859.07		\$2,310.77			\$58,169.84	Change in Value of Investments



JANUARY 2018 ~ IN THE YEAR OF THE LORD

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

1 Circumcision of Christ/St. Basil 9:00 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy of St. Basil Church Office Closed	2	3 No Adult Study	4 5:45 pm Young Adults Ice Skating at The Cosmopolitan	5 Eve of Theophany 8:00 am Royal Hours 9:00 am Divine Liturgy of St. Basil & Great Blessing of Water	6 Holy Theophany 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy & Great Blessing of Water Fellowship follows 6:00 pm Great Vespers
7 St. John the Baptist Our Parish Feast Day 8:45 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy 5:30 pm GOYA Christmas Tree Take-Down & Dinner	8 7:00 pm Adult Basketball	9 10:30 am Moms & Tots in Church 5:00 pm Greek Language Classes 6:00 pm Philoptochos General Meeting in Kokkos Hall	10 7:00 pm Adult Study	11	12
14 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	15 7:00 pm Adult Basketball	16 5:00 pm Greek Language Classes 6:00 pm Parish Council Meeting in Library	17 St. Anthony the Great 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy 7:00 pm Adult Study	18	19
21 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy Youth Choir Chants	22 11:30 am Forerunners Luncheon in Panos Hall 7:00 pm Adult Basketball	23 5:00 pm Greek Language Classes	24 5:00 pm Orthros 6:00 pm Divine Liturgy (St. Gregory the Theologian) 7:00 pm Adult Study	25 St. Gregory the Theologian (Celebrated 1/24)	26
28 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy 1:00 pm Youth Ice Skating at LV Ice Center	29 7:00 pm Adult Basketball	30 5:00 pm Greek Language Classes	31 No Adult Study		
Metropolis Clergy Laity 1/29-30 Clergy Retreat 1/30-31			Greek Folk Dance Practices: Sunday: Liondaria 12:45-1:30 pm, Delfinia & Elliniki Iperifania 1:00 – 2:45 pm Tuesday & Thursday: Delfinia & Elliniki Iperifania 6:00-7:30 pm		
Folk Dance Festival			Folk Dance Festival at SF Marriott Marquis 1/11-15		
					20 6:00 pm Mr. and Mrs. Potluck at Mike and Effie Lekar's Home
					27

The Desert Messenger

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

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THE DESERT MESSENGER

The Way of the Lord



“Hearkening to the voice of the one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,’ You came, Lord, assuming the form of a servant, asking to be baptized, though having known no sin. The waters saw You and were afraid. The Forerunner was shaken and cried out, saying, ‘How shall the lamp give light to the Light? How shall the servant lay hand on the Master?’ Sanctify me and the waters, Savior, Who takes away the sin of the world.”

*~ St. Sophronios,
Patriarch of Jerusalem*