

# The Desert



# Messenger

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

Volume 23, Issue 1 St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Las Vegas, NV

January 2025

From  
Father  
John

Beloved in Christ:

By the grace of God I greet all of you for the New Year, and I pray that each and every day He grants in 2025 we might “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*” (2 Peter 3:18)

Our Orthodox Christian liturgical calendar calls us to spiritual renewal during the first week of the New Year. Having recently celebrated the Nativity in the Flesh of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, we remember twelve days later His second *manifestation*, which took place at His Baptism at the age of thirty, on the Great Feast appropriately called *Theophany* (meaning *manifestation of God*). The indelible link between Christ’s Nativity and Baptism *and* our salvation has been emphasized by the Church from its earliest years, as summed up in the appointed Epistle reading for *January 6*: “. . . *according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, Whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*” (Titus 3:5-7)



For us Orthodox Christians, each celebration of Theophany is the commemoration of Jesus’ Baptism by the hands of St. John the Baptist, through which our Lord readied the waters for our own “*washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.*” The Holy Trinity was revealed to the world at the Jordan River – the Father by His voice, the Son in Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. Likewise, through Holy Baptism, in the words of the Apostle Paul, we “*put on Christ*” (Galatians 3:27), and coming out of the water we are sealed with the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Holy Chrismation; finally through our new birth and life in the Church, we “*become heirs*” of God’s Kingdom, as promised by the Father.

Twenty years ago, *on June 5, 2005*, we experienced the “Baptism and Chrismation of our Holy Church” with the Consecration of St. John the Baptist. As a community we started preparing months in advance, making sure our Church was properly adorned, and every detail was in place for this Parish milestone. Moreover, we also understood the importance of educating our Parish members and spiritually preparing us all for this once-in-a-lifetime holy event: For the Consecration was not only about the Church building – to set it apart for God – but equally for our faithful members, as both are *manifestations* of the mystical Body of Christ and are called by Him to be “set apart” for His Kingdom.

Twenty years later, in 2025, we have seen the abundant fruits of the Consecration, with the operative grace of the Holy Spirit which continues to work in the hearts of countless people who serve, labor, support, worship, are drawn to, return to, come home to, and are blessed by the Lord through the true faith, worship and ministries of our beloved local community of the universal Orthodox Church. With the blessing of the New Year, may we all – as members by grace of Christ’s Body – become more fervent in our commitment to preparing ourselves and one another for the Second Coming of our Lord: Seize every moment and opportunity He grants us!

With Abundant Love in Christ,

## WORSHIP SCHEDULE

*Sundays: 8:45 am Orthros - 10:00 am Divine Liturgy  
Church School follows Holy Communion (Except January 5 and 12)*

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

*No Fasting through January 4*

*Wednesday, 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*

*Sunday, January 5/ Sunday before Theophany/ Eve of the Theophany of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ/ Holy Martyrs Theopemptus and Theonas/ Righteous Synkletike of Alexandria/*

*St. Gregory of Akrita/ St. Apollinaria of Egypt*

*Orthros: Third Tone*

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

*Epistle: 2 Timothy 4:5-8*

*Gospel: Mark 1:1-8*

*Great Blessing of the Water follows Liturgy*

*Fellowship: The Kitchen Crew*

*Monday, January 6/ Holy Theophany of Our Lord*

*8:00 am Orthros*

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

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

*Gospel: Matthew 3:13-17*

*Great Blessing of the Water follows Liturgy*



*Tuesday, January 7/ Synaxis of St. John the Baptist*

*Our Parish Feast Day*

*8:00 am Orthros - 9:00 am Divine Liturgy*

*Epistle: Acts 19:1-8*

*Gospel: John 1:29-34*

*Fellowship: Philoptochos*

*Sunday, January 12/ Sunday after Theophany/ St. Tatiana the Martyr of Rome/ Holy Hieromartyrs Basil and John/ Holy Martyr Mertios/ Holy Martyr Euthasia the Virgin/ St. Peter of Absalom/ St. Benedict*

*Orthros: Fourth Tone*

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

*Epistle: Ephesians 4:7-13*

*Gospel: Matthew 4:12-17*

*Parish Council Oath of Office*

*Cutting of Community Vasilopita*

*St. John the Baptist Name Day*

*Luncheon*

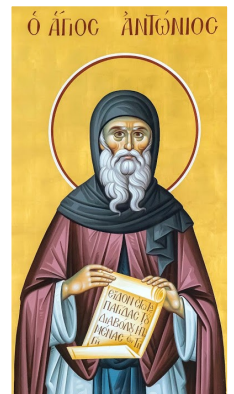
*Friday, January 17/ St. Anthony the Great / St. Anthony of Veria*

*8:00 am Orthros*

*9:00 am Divine Liturgy*

*Epistle: Hebrews 13:17-21*

*Gospel: Luke 6:17-23*



*Sunday, January 19/ 12 Sunday of Luke/ St. Makarios the Great of Egypt/ St. Makarios of Alexandria/ St. Mark, Bishop of Ephesus/ St. Makarios, Hierodeacon of Kalogera/ St. Arsenios of Corfu/ Removal of the Honorable Relics of St Gregory the Theologian/ St. Branwallader, Bishop of Jersey*

*Orthros: First Plagal Tone*

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

*Epistle: Colossians 3:4-11*

*Gospel: Luke 17:12-19*

*Memorial: Ekaterina Charykova (40 days)*

*Fellowship: Folk Dance*

*Sunday, January 26/ 15th Sunday of Luke/ Holy Father Xenophon and His Companions/ St. Symeon the Elder of Mount Sinai*

*Orthros: Second Plagal Tone*

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

*Epistle: 1 Timothy 4:9-15*

*Gospel: Luke 19:1-10*

*Fellowship: Folk Dance Fasolada Fundraiser*

**WORSHIP SCHEDULE** *(Continued)*

Wednesday, January 29

5:00 pm Orthros - 6:00 pm Divine Liturgy  
*(The Three Holy Hierarchs: Ss. Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom)*

Epistle: Hebrews 13:7-16

Gospel: Matthew 5:14-19

*Thursday, January 30/The Three Holy Hierarchs  
 (Liturgy Celebrated on Wednesday Evening)*



**Baptized into Christ: Na Mas Zisi**

Zoey, daughter of George and Candace Antoniou,  
 on November 30, 2024.

Godparent: Dimitri Antoniou.

Efstratios Lerma (Adult Baptism)  
 on December 28, 2024.

Godparents: Georgios and Vasiliki Sakkas.

**Parish Council Report**

Dear Father John, Father Florin, Deacon John, Ministries and Parishioners,  
 Chronia Polla! Wishing all of you a healthy, prosperous, and above all, a New Year resolution that brings us closer to our Lord.

Future plans for Iconography, beautification of our buildings, including painting the halls and Community Center, and renovating our floors are all topics that have been discussed and supported by the Parish Council.

The Parish Council is very pleased to announce, as a result of a unanimous vote of approval, that the Church halls will be available solely for use by our Stewards. The exact pricing is to be determined but will be at rates below what other banquet facilities charge. It is the policy that our Parish Stewards should have the benefit of using these beautiful facilities.

Also, the Parish Council, working together with Father John and Father Florin, will be raising funds for the next phase of Iconography. Our Iconographer has wonderful plans that will be exciting for everyone to see.

There is ongoing discussion concerning the grass and artificial turf. More to come.

Our annual luncheon for our Patron Saint, John the Baptist, will take place *on Sunday, January 12*, following Divine Liturgy in Panos Hall. The cost is \$15 per person. We will also have the Parish Council Oath of Office, Election of Officers, and the Community Vasilopita.

Reflecting on the past year, there have been many positive activities that have brought us together in communion with Christ. Our ministries have had much success and for that I am thankful. Our spiritual leaders, Father John, Father Florin and Deacon John, have had a major impact on bringing us together and supporting our quest to be the best in our love for each other, with Christ at the forefront. May 2025 bring us an even better understanding of our devotion to God. There is no room for negativity.

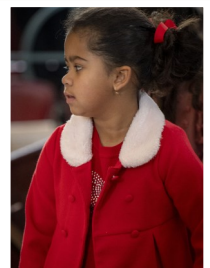
In closing, please join me in congratulating the new Parish Council members and officers. I pray that we are guided by God in all our decision making.

I want to again thank all of you for your total support and personal wishes from many of our faithful. I know that your new council members and executive positions will be influenced by prayer and devotion of time.

With much love, I remain yours in Christ, John Fotopoulos, Parish Council President



*“Our entire life has but one goal and only one rule:  
 To observe the commandments of God  
 according to God’s pleasure.”  
 - St. Basil the Great*







Please join us for our . . .

# *St. John the Baptist Name Day Luncheon*

*Sunday, January 12, 2025  
Following Divine Liturgy  
Panos Hall*

*Menu: Salad, Baked Chicken, Rice, Green Beans, Bread,  
Karidopita and Coffee*

**\$15 per person**

**Proceeds benefit St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church**

## 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 a bowl of bottled water, a sprig of  
basil or rosemary, an icon or cross, and votive candle.*

*If you or anyone in your household feels sick prior to the blessing,  
please call to reschedule.*

## Philoptochos News

Dear Father John, Father Florin, Deacon John, All the Wonderful Parishioners of St. John the Baptist and the Lovely Members of the Ladies Philoptochos Society,

I begin with the Kontakion (Fourth Tone) for the Feast of Holy Epiphany: *“Today You appeared to the world, and Your light, O Lord, has left its mark upon us as in fuller understanding we sing to You: You came, You were made manifest, the unapproachable Light.”*

In paraphrasing the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese website, “the Manifestation of the Light, our Lord revealed Himself to us, (and) we see the Holy Trinity clearly for all mankind to know.” Our Lord’s Epiphany is the beginning of our belief in the Holy Trinity and through our Baptism, the initiation of our life in our Faith and Church. In essence, our first Stewardship begins with Baptism, and we continue to maintain our devotions, our prayers and participation in our Church all our lives.

Involvement in our Church life is the ideal and focus of the Ladies Philoptochos Society. Our beautiful Mission Statement expresses in detail what the Ladies Philoptochos strive to accomplish every year.

Dear fellow ladies of St. John the Baptist, now is the time that membership – now referred to as Stewardship – in the Philoptochos Society begins for 2025. The Board and members affectionately invite you to join the most worthwhile ministry of our Faith. Your participation will fill your life, your precious time, utilize your talents, hearts and hands, and occasionally your laughter and tears will be indispensable.

We feed the poor, we help the homeless, we nourish the spirits of the ill in health, we help the elderly and veterans. We sponsor projects to help our ministries, community – locally, nationally and internationally – and the Church. And yes, we do this one cookie and fundraiser at a time.

Please make your plans to join us *on Sunday, January 26* following Divine Liturgy for *Membership and Margaritas*. Please see the flyer for more information.

As always, I remain your sister in Christ, Bernadette Anthony, Philoptochos President

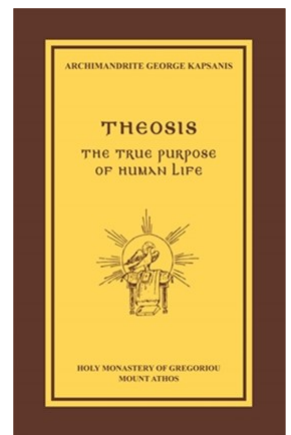


## Orthodox Bookstore

Greetings from the Bookstore and Happy New Year!

This month’s featured selection is from St. Herman Press of Alaska and is a great read to start off the New Year with a renewed focus on the very reason for taking up a life in Christ. *Theosis, the True Purpose of Human Life*, by Archmandrite George Kapsanis is now available in the Bookstore.

From the publisher: This book, written by a renowned spiritual writer and Abbot of Gregoriou Monastery, Mount Athos, concerns the most important question faced by every human being, namely, for what purpose were we created? Drawing from the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Church Fathers, Elder George shows that we were made in God’s image in order to reach even higher and attain to His likeness, to attain to personal union with Him. Our Creator, Who is God by Nature, calls us to become gods by Grace, united with Him in love. This is the meaning of theosis. Although man cut off the path to theosis at the Fall, Christ – Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life – reopened it through His Incarnation, Death and Resurrection. In the famous words of St. Athanasios the Great, “God became Man so that man could become god.” Based on talks that Elder George gave in cities throughout Greece, this book discusses the theology, experiences, and conditions of theosis. In conclusion, he offers guidance on what to do and what not to do on the path to theosis.



We look forward to seeing you in the Bookstore for your copy and other devotional needs!

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

***BELIEVE. BELONG. BE LOVED. STEWARDSHIP 2025!***

Dear Beloved,

As we have seen this year, we can no longer rely on the Greek Food Festival to support the continued operations of our Church. While the Festival is still a wonderful showcase of our culture, food and faith, we cannot rely upon it to be the financial foundation of our Parish. Instead, our Stewardship Pledge should be the main source for keeping our Church Community thriving and open to all of our Parish.

The Stewardship Committee believes this shift in the financial support, growth and well-being of our Church is necessary and we need to start now.

Our Parish Stewardship goal is to raise \$700,000.00 through Stewardship pledging. How can we accomplish this? It's not as difficult as it sounds. If every Parish Steward were to increase their pledge by a minimum of 16% we would meet our goal. Let's give you some examples:

If you were to sacrifice one (1) \$7.50 coffee per week, that's a savings of \$400.00 for the entire year you could contribute toward Stewardship.

If you were to sacrifice one (1) round of 2 craft cocktails for \$35.00 per month, that savings of \$420.00 you could contribute to Stewardship.

If you were to sacrifice having one Chick-fil-A deluxe chicken sandwich with waffle fries and a medium drink (\$10.54) once per week, that would be a savings of \$548.08 savings for the year that could be paid toward Stewardship.

Such "sacrifices" are well worth keeping your Parish, Priests, Sacraments, Church School, Greek Dance, GOYA, Philoptochos and all the other ministries and Parish events and Church functions.

Please pray and reflect on your 2025 Stewardship Pledge and return it to the Church in the envelope provided. *"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." (1 Peter 4:10)*

In Christ, St. John the Baptist Stewardship Committee



***Congratulations to our Stewardship All-Stars for 2024:  
Michael Beeler, Eileen Koutsulis and Presvytera Maria Hondros!***



*"Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."  
(Matthew 6:33)*



# STEWARDSHIP 2025

Make your Pledge online at the QR code below  
or return your Stewardship Form and offering to the Church Office.

## “BELIEVE, BELONG, BE LOVED!”



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

+++++

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

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

“BELIEVE, BELONG, BE LOVED!”

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church  
5300 El Camino Road  
Las Vegas, Nevada 89118  
(702) 221-8245

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 2025 of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

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

Orthodox Christian: Yes No

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

Orthodox Christian: Yes No

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

# The Ladies Philoptochos

OFFICERS AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS JOYFULLY  
INVITE YOU TO

## MEMBERSHIP & MARGARITAS

PLEASE JOIN US FOR A LOVELY AFTERNOON OF  
FELLOWSHIP TO CELEBRATE OUR MINISTRY OF  
PHILOPTOCHOS, HONOR OUR LONG-STANDING MEMBERS,  
AND WELCOME OUR NEW MEMBERS.

# 01.26.2025

FOLLOWING DIVINE LITURGY

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE RESERVE \_\_\_\_\_

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

**To RSVP please return this completed form to the  
church office or contacting Christina Snow at  
[snowy4000@gmail.com](mailto:snowy4000@gmail.com)**



# Annual Greek Folk Dance Preview & Glendi

February 8, 2025

## Performances By:

Liondaria  
Asteria  
Aetopoula  
Xrisi Ippotes



Live Music  
From Greece

6 PM in  
Panos Hall

### Filled With Fun!

Dinner  
Cash Bar  
Raffle



Tickets Go On  
Sale:

January 12,  
2025

**\$30 Per Person**  
Children Under 5 FREE

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Reservations **STRONGLY**  
Encouraged

## From Father Florin

One of the greatest Fathers of the Orthodox Church is a monk, St. Maximos, whom we commemorate *on January 21* and whose fearless courage in witnessing to – “confessing” – even while suffering, the integrity of his faith in Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, Savior of the world, earned him the title of *Confessor*. St. Maximos was born in Palestine, the land of the Lord, in about 580. As a boy he was initiated to the monastic life and the study of the Scriptures through the works of Origen, the great teacher who by the third century had already “established” the exegetic tradition of Alexandria.

St. Maximos moved from Jerusalem to Constantinople and from there, because of the barbarian invasions, sought refuge in Africa. Here he was distinguished by his extreme courage in the defense of Orthodoxy. St. Maximos refused to accept any reduction of Christ’s humanity. A theory had come into being which held that there was only one will in Christ, the Divine will. To defend the oneness of Christ’s Person, people denied that He had His own true and proper human will. At first sight, it might seem to be a good thing that Christ had only one will. But St. Maximos immediately realized that this would destroy the mystery of salvation, for humanity without a will, a man without a will, is not a real man but an amputated man. Had this been so, the Man Jesus Christ would not have been a true man, He would not have experienced the drama of being human which consists, precisely, of conforming our will with the great truth of being. Thus, St. Maximos declared with great determination that

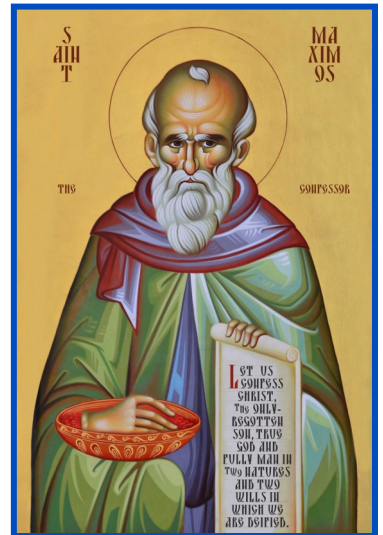
*“In times of peaceful relationships do not recall what was said by a brother when there was bad feeling between you, even if offensive things were said to your face, or to another person about you and you subsequently heard of them. Otherwise you will harbor thoughts of rancor and revert to your destructive hatred of your brother.”*  
(*Four Hundred Texts on Love 4:34*)

Sacred Scripture does not portray to us an amputated man with no will but rather a true and complete man: God, in Jesus Christ, really assumed the totality of being human – obviously except for sin – hence also a human will.

His point is clear: Christ either is or is not a man. If He is a man, He also has a will. But here the problem arises: Do we not end up with a sort of dualism? Do we not reach the point of affirming two complete personalities: reason, will, sentiment? How is it possible to overcome dualism, to keep the completeness of the human being and yet succeed in preserving the unity of the Person of Christ Who was not schizophrenic? St. Maximos demonstrates that man does not find his unity, the integration of himself or his totality within himself but by surpassing himself, by coming out of himself. Thus, also in Christ, by coming out of Himself, man finds himself in God, in

the Son of God. It is not necessary to amputate man to explain the Incarnation; all that is required is to understand the dynamism of the human being who is fulfilled only by coming out of himself; it is in God alone that we find ourselves, our totality and our completeness. Hence, we see that the person who withdraws into himself is not a complete person but the person who is open, who comes out of himself, becomes complete and finds himself, finds his true humanity, precisely in the Son of God.

For St. Maximos, this vision did not remain a philosophical speculation; he saw it realized in Jesus’ actual life, especially in the Garden of Gethsemane. In this drama of Jesus’ agony, of the anguish of death, of the opposition between the human will not to die and the Divine will which offers itself to death in Gethsemane, where the whole human drama of our redemption is played out. St. Maximos tells us that, and we know that this is true, Adam (and we ourselves are Adam) thought that the “no” was the peak of freedom. He thought that only a person who can say “no” is truly free; that if he is truly to achieve his freedom, man must say “no” to God; only in this way he believed he could, at last, be himself, that he had reached the heights of freedom. This tendency also carried within it the human nature of Christ, but went beyond it, for Jesus saw that it was not the “no” that was the height of freedom.



*(Continued on Page 11)*

*From Father Florin (Continued from Page 10)*

The height of freedom is the “yes”, in conformity with God’s will. It is only in the “yes” that man truly becomes himself; only in the great openness of the “yes”, in the unification of his will with the Divine, that man becomes immensely open, becomes “divine”. What Adam wanted was to be like God, that is, to be completely free. But the person who withdraws into himself is not divine, is not completely free; he is freed by emerging from himself, it is in the “yes” that he becomes free; and this is the significance of Gethsemane: *Not My will, but Yours*. It is by transferring human will to the Divine will that the real person is born, it is in this way that we are redeemed.

In 662, St. Maximos opposed the Emperor, repeating: “*It cannot be said that Christ has a single will!*” Thus, together with his two disciples, both called Anastasios, St. Maximos was subjected to an exhausting trial although he was then over 80 years of age. The Emperor’s tribunal condemned him with the accusation of heresy, sentencing him to the cruel mutilation of his tongue and his right hand – the two organs through which, by words and writing, St. Maximos had fought the erroneous doctrine of the single will of Christ. In the end, thus mutilated, the holy monk was finally exiled to the region of Colchis on the Black Sea where he reposed, worn out by the suffering he had endured, at the age of 82, that same year.



Let us conclude with a fundamental passage from one of St. Maximos’ works: “*We adore one Son together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning before all time, is now and ever shall be, for all time and for the time after time. Amen!*”

*Fr. F. J. Ristache.*

*Byzantine Chanters and Choir*

Happy New Year!

Thank you to all who are participating in our music group. Mark your calendars for the following practices: Short practice *on Sunday, January 5* in the Church, and an extended practice *on Sunday, January 26*. Please grab a snack and meet in Classroom 6.

God’s Blessings for a healthy 2025!

**ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST  
GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH**

5300 El Camino Road  
Las Vegas, NV 89118

Rev. Father John Hondros  
frjohn@vegaskgreekorthodox.com

Rev. Father Florin Ristache  
frflorin@vegaskgreekorthodox.com

Rev. Deacon John Nixon  
deaconjohn@vegaskgreekorthodox.com

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Michelle Eugenio  
Bookkeeper

Claudia Kasiotis  
Housekeeping

*Office Hours*

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

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

Parish Council: John Fotopoulos

Philoptochos: Bernadette Anthony

Stewardship and Community Outreach:  
George Bochanis

Maintenance: Steve Tzelalis

Building Committee:  
Eleni Filios & Steve Tzelalis

Byzantine Chanters and Choir  
Presvytera Maria Hondros

Church School: Eileen Koutsulis

Altar Servers: Father John & Mark Stransky

GOYA: Father Florin & Maha Habiba

Orthodox Family Fellowship:  
Father Florin & April Rivera

Young Adults: Father Florin

Greek Folk Dance: Sia Dalacas

Greek Language:  
Paula Kelesis

Mr. & Mrs.:

Father John & Presvytera Maria,  
Father Florin & Presvytera Alexandra

Kali Parea: Demetrious Asim

Forerunners: Paula Kelesis

Orthodox Bookstore: Paraskevi Santamaria

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

Greek Food Festival:  
Steve Tzelalis

Photography and Live-Streaming:  
Bill & Erin Bruninga



## Ministry News

### Church School

Hi Everyone! Christ is Born! Glorify Him! Happy 2025! I hope everyone has a wonderful 2025 with health and happiness. I hope all of the kids had a wonderful time at our Nativity craft and pizza party. Thank you to Paula Kelesis and Diana Tsouras for the cookies!

The year is going strong, and the students seem to be enjoying themselves in Church School learning our curriculum.

Please reach out to the teachers to see if they need anything or any help. Snacks and small bottles of water are always greatly appreciated.

Family Worship Sunday Dates to Remember: *Sunday, January 5 - Eve of Theophany and Great Blessing of Water, and Sunday, January 12 - Cutting of the Community Vasilopita.*

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



### All Youth Event

Dear Kids, Teenagers, and Parents,

Thank you all who joined us for our Parish Christmas Tree decoration last month!

This month we are planning on having fun again by going *ICE SKATING!* Please join us *on Saturday, January 11, starting at 5:00 pm at Rock Rink at Downtown Summerlin* for an evening of fun!

For questions or to RSVP, please contact Father Florin at [frflorin@vegasgreekorthodox.com](mailto:frflorin@vegasgreekorthodox.com).

In Christ, Father Florin, Maha Habiba, GOYA Advisor, and April Rivera, OFF Advisor

### Youth Greek Language Classes

As we wrap up this wonderful year in our Greek class, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the incredible families whose support made this journey so special. Your encouragement and dedication have been the cornerstone of our success. To our amazing children, your hard work and achievements have been truly inspiring, and you are now ready to move confidently to the next level.

A special thank you to the Pan-Arcadians and our amazing Director Paula Kelesis for her unwavering support of our Greek school and its mission. It has been an honor and joy to teach in such a warm and loving community.

Please mark your calendar that we will not have class *on Monday, January 20.*

Katerina Katelouzos, Greek School Instructor

### Adult Greek Language Classes

The Adult Greek School Class is making great progress, and we have great camaraderie among the group. We wish everyone a Happy New Year! George Kouris, Adult Greek School Instructor

### Kali Parea - For the 40+ Crowd

We encourage everyone to participate as much as possible at the liturgical services in our beloved Church. This month is full of major feasts that will unite us in the One Mystical Body of Christ. Please stay tuned, as we will resume our monthly fellowships soon! With Love in Christ, Demetrious Asim



## *Greek Folk Dance*

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! We had a very busy December!

Thank you to those in our community who supported our annual Christmas Caroling event! It was a huge success, and we cannot underestimate our appreciation to all who welcomed us into their home and provided donations for our fundraiser. A special thank you to Antonia Tzelalis who works tirelessly with our dancers to help them learn the carols, in both Greek and English.

Our Ministry is having a See's Candies sale in preparation for Valentines' Day! A portion of the sales go to our program, so please purchase your chocolates through this link:

[https://www.yumraising.com/secure/stjtb\\_st\\_john\\_las\\_vegas\\_greek\\_dance\\_fundraise41/Ireire1531/candy](https://www.yumraising.com/secure/stjtb_st_john_las_vegas_greek_dance_fundraise41/Ireire1531/candy).

Our dancers continue to practice hard every week, getting ready to show off their moves at FDF in February! We look forward to performing our suites at the FDF Preview and Glendi *on Saturday, February 8, 2025* in Panos Hall! It will be a wonderful dinner event showcasing our youth and then celebrating our culture with LIVE Greek music from very talented musicians from Greece! Tickets are \$30 (children under 5 are free)

Reservations are STRONGLY ENCOURAGED, and tickets go on sale during Fellowship *on Sunday, January 12*. Thanks again for all your support and we wish everyone a Blessed New Year.

Much Gratitude, Folk Dance Board



## *Altar Servers*

As we welcome the New Year, we encourage new Acolytes **8 years through adult** to join us in serving in the Altar! There are many Holy Services and your willingness to assist would be greatly appreciated and pleasing to God. Please contact Father John in person or at [frjohn@vegasgreekorthodox.com](mailto:frjohn@vegasgreekorthodox.com) if you are interested, and he will give you his blessing to serve.

Yours in Christ's Service, Father John

## *Young Adults - 18 Years through Early 30s*

Thank you all who participated in our White Elephant exchange gift last month at Christos' home! We had a good time and the food was awesome, so we thank him again so much for that!

This month, please join us *on Saturday, January 11, beginning at 1:00 pm at Suncoast Bowling Center*. We will go bowling and we will celebrate, at the same time, Jeremiah's Birthday while saying "goodbye" to Jaden who will be starting a new job in Texas.

Please let me know you are coming by contacting me at [frflorin@vegasgreekorthodox.com](mailto:frflorin@vegasgreekorthodox.com).

I look forward to meeting with all of you there!

With Love in Christ, Father Florin



*Mr. & Mrs.*

Dear Couples of St. John the Baptist,

Please mark your calendars for *Saturday, January 4, starting at 6:00 pm*, when we will meet at the home of Effie and Mike Lekar, whom we thank for generously opening their house to us. We will start our evening by blessing their home, and then we will enjoy together a lovely meal and a discussion. Please contact our Church Office for their address and let us know what you will bring. As always, we are looking forward to seeing you all there!

Yours in Christ, Father John, Presvytera Maria, Father Florin and Presvytera Alexandra

*Forerunners - Our Seniors Fellowship*

Chronia Polla! The Forerunners enjoyed a delicious Christmas luncheon, thanks to Peter Papas. We had a blast with our White Elephant Gift Exchange and Grand Raffle and everyone got to take home a bottle of wine.

We hope to see more of you again *on Monday, January 13 at 11:30 am in Kokkos Hall*. We will cut a Vasilopita together and ring in the New Year!

Love in Christ, Paula Kelesis for the Forerunners



*The waters saw You, O God; the waters saw You and were afraid.  
The Jordan turned back, when it saw the fire of Divinity bodily go down and into it.  
The Jordan turned back, when it saw the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove  
come down and hover over You.  
The Jordan turned back, when it saw the Invisible visible, the Creator Incarnate,  
the Master in the form of a servant.  
(Great Blessing of the Water on Holy Theophany)*



## *Building and Maintenance*

Greetings and Happy New Year!

As many of you have noticed, we have begun the flooring project in both Panos and Kokkos Halls, as well as repainting the lower wall areas. We understand that this has been an inconvenience, but we greatly appreciate everyone's understanding and patience as we work to complete this project. Once finished, we can focus on reestablishing the Catering and Events (C&E) Committee and begin hosting more events to generate revenue for our overhead expenses.

Many of you may not be aware that, at its peak, our C&E Committee managed to cover 78% of our overhead expenditures through event revenue. This remarkable achievement highlights the importance of revitalizing this committee and its activities. We also ask parents to ensure that children avoid climbing on niches or damaging the walls with footprints. Children should not be in the foyers without supervision.

We were also honored to have our Iconographer, Andromahi, visit us before Thanksgiving. During her visit, the remaining icons were selected, and the tentative installation is scheduled for Lent in 2026. There are several Saint Icons still available for dedication, providing a meaningful opportunity for families and individuals to contribute.

Looking ahead, our next project will involve painting and re-stuccoing the Hall/Administrative Building. We aim to start this project in the spring, but we need your support to make it happen. Please consider making a donation toward this much-needed improvement. Without your generosity, none of these capital projects would be possible.

If you have any questions about the Iconography or are interested in joining or assisting the C&E Committee, please do not hesitate to reach out.

I wish everyone a very healthy and happy 2025 filled with many blessings!

With Love, Eleni Filios, Building Committee Chair



Shine in our hearts, O Master Who loves mankind, the pure light of Your Divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our mind that we may comprehend the proclamations of Your Gospels. Instill in us also reverence for Your blessed commandments so that, having trampled down all carnal desires, we may lead a spiritual life, both thinking and doing all those things that are pleasing to You. For You, Christ our God, are the illumination of our souls and bodies, and to You we offer up glory, together with Your Father, Who is without beginning, and Your All-Holy, good, and Life-creating Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

# Happy Valentine's Day!



Support the Greek Folk Dance Ministry  
by purchasing **See's Candies** for  
Valentine's Day!

\* All candy will be mailed directly to you.\*



*The Clark County Orthodox Clergy Association  
Invites All Adults to Join Us for the  
Annual Lenten Retreat*



**Saturday, March 22, 2025**

*St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church*

**Father Tom and  
Presvytera Pat Tsagalakis  
Retreat Speakers**



**\$25 per Person or \$50 per Couple  
Lenten Lunch Included  
RSVP by March 15, 2024  
Please register at the link below or scan QR code.**



Join Father Tom and Presvytera Pat Tsagalakis of the Family Wellness Ministry for a dynamic and interactive retreat focusing on cultivating life-giving relationships as we grow in faith, healing and love.

Register at the link below for the “Created for Connection” Retreat for couples who are dating, engaged, married or individuals seeking to be in a relationship.

**CLICK HERE:  
[RETREAT - March 22, 2025](#)**

Program

8:00 am	Orthros
8:30 am	Divine Liturgy
9:30 am	Coffee and Refreshments
10:00 am	<i>Session 1</i>
12:00 pm	Lenten Lunch
1:00 pm	<i>Session 2</i>
3:00 pm	Wrap Up



**2024  
Stewardship  
Report  
(as of 12/30/24)**

Stewardship Gifts Pledged: \$627,709 (\$603,025 in 2023)  
 Stewardship Gifts Received: \$578,932 (\$580,240 in 2023)  
 Unfulfilled Pledge Balance: \$48,777 (\$22,785 in 2023)  
 Stewardship Families Pledged: 468 (462 in 2023)  
 2024 Goal: \$600,000

*“BELIEVE,  
BELONG,  
BE LOVED!”*

<u>Average Pledge</u>	<u>No. of Families</u>	<u>Amount Pledged</u>
\$1 - \$500	213	\$ 51,115
\$501 - \$1,000	76	\$ 58,822
\$1,001 - \$2,500	118	\$183,788
\$2,501 - \$5,000	38	\$134,687
\$5,001 - \$9999	16	\$ 98,422
\$10,000 & Above	<u>7</u>	<u>\$100,875</u>
<b>Total Families</b>	<b>468</b>	<b>\$627,709</b>

**Church Account Summaries - November 2024**

Nevada State Bank Accounts	October	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdrawals/ Checks	Transfers Out	November	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
General Operating Account (GOA)	\$103,780.81	\$80,736.19		46,977.13	\$47,904.62	\$89,635.25	
Community and Education (C&E)	\$22,925.49					\$22,925.49	
Greek Food Festival (GFF)	\$132,175.40	4,321.68		\$71,251.30	\$8,272.42	\$56,973.36	
Designated, Restricted & Other (DR&O)	\$263,872.68	\$6,480.62		\$1,491.47	\$2,822.96	\$266,038.87	
Building & Maintenance (B&M)	\$64,686.77	\$101,125.00		\$40.00		\$165,771.77	
Folk Dance Group	\$25,021.04	\$523.00		\$3,242.29	\$692.06	\$21,609.69	
Hellenic Historical Society	\$790.96					\$790.96	
<b>Designated Funds</b>	<b>October</b>	<b>Deposits</b>	<b>Transfers In</b>	<b>Withdrawals/ Checks</b>	<b>Transfers Out</b>	<b>November</b>	<b>Notes</b>
	<b>Ending Balance</b>					<b>Ending Balance</b>	
Bookstore	\$37,452.99	\$5,581.18		\$1,294.32	\$2,822.96	\$38,916.89	
<b>Restricted Funds</b>	<b>October</b>	<b>Deposits</b>	<b>Transfers In</b>	<b>Withdrawals/ Checks</b>	<b>Transfers Out</b>	<b>November</b>	<b>Notes</b>
	<b>Ending Balance</b>					<b>Ending Balance</b>	
ICON	\$15,189.45	\$799.44				\$15,988.89	
Faithtree	\$1,626.39					\$1,626.39	
Youth Choir	\$2,989.18					\$2,989.18	
Church School	\$126,031.53			\$197.15		\$125,834.38	
GOYA	\$530.36					\$530.36	
Eyler Memorial Fund	\$10,290.15	\$100.00				\$10,390.15	
Emergency Fund	\$5,000.00					\$5,000.00	
Three Priests	\$64,322.63					\$64,322.63	
Altar Servers	\$440.00					\$440.00	
<b>Designated, Restricted and Other Total</b>	<b>\$263,872.68</b>	<b>\$6,480.62</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$1,491.47</b>	<b>\$2,822.96</b>	<b>\$266,038.87</b>	
<b>Building and Maintenance Funds</b>	<b>October</b>	<b>Deposits</b>	<b>Transfers In</b>	<b>Withdrawals/ Checks</b>	<b>Transfers Out</b>	<b>November</b>	<b>Notes</b>
	<b>Ending Balance</b>					<b>Ending Balance</b>	
Building Fund	\$9,355.35	\$125.00		\$40.00		\$9,440.35	
Panos Flooring Repair	\$36,330.33				\$36,330.33	\$0.00	Transferred to Hall Project
Hall Painting	\$10,283.22				\$10,283.22	\$0.00	Transferred to Hall Project
Hall Project		\$100,000.00	\$46,613.55			\$146,613.55	
Giving Tree	\$8,717.87	\$1,000.00				\$9,717.87	
<b>Building &amp; Maintenance Funds Total</b>	<b>\$64,686.77</b>	<b>\$101,125.00</b>	<b>\$46,613.55</b>	<b>\$40.00</b>	<b>\$46,613.55</b>	<b>\$165,771.77</b>	
<b>Other Funds</b>	<b>October</b>	<b>Deposits</b>	<b>Transfers In</b>	<b>Withdrawals/ Checks</b>	<b>Transfers Out</b>	<b>November</b>	<b>Notes</b>
	<b>Ending Balance</b>					<b>Ending Balance</b>	
Kokkos Scholarship Fund	\$72,275.91		\$4,449.13			\$76,725.04	as of 09.30.24
Commonwealth Investments (Icon)	\$152,702.51		\$5,053.14			\$157,755.65	

November 2024 Candles **\$5,469.85**  
 November 2024 Trays **\$4,296.40**  
**Total November 2024 Candles & Trays \$9,766.25**



# JANUARY 2025 ~ IN THE YEAR OF THE LORD



Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

<p><b>5 Eve of Theophany (Strict Fast)</b>                  8:45 am Orthros                  10:00 am Divine Liturgy and Great Blessing of Water                  Chanters/Choir Practice</p>	 <p><b>6 Holy Theophany</b>                  8:00 am Orthros                  9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Great Blessing of Water                  4:30 pm Youth and Adult Greek School Classes</p>	<p><b>7 St. John the Baptist</b>                  8:00 am Orthros                  9:00 am Divine Liturgy Fellowship Hosted by Philoptochos follows</p>	<p><b>1 Circumcision of Christ/St. Basil the Great</b>                  9:00 am Orthros                  10:00 am Divine Liturgy of St. Basil</p>	<p><b>2</b></p>	<p><b>3</b></p>	<p><b>4</b>                  6:00 pm Mr. and Mrs. at Lekar Home</p>
<p><b>12</b>                  8:45 am Orthros                  10:00 am Divine Liturgy                  Parish Council Oath                  Community Vasilopita                  Name Day Luncheon</p>	<p><b>13</b>                  11:30 am Forerunners Luncheon in Kokkos                  4:30 pm Youth and Adult Greek School Classes</p>	<p><b>14</b>                  6:00 pm Parish Council Meeting in Library</p>	<p><b>15</b></p>	<p><b>16</b></p>	<p><b>17 St. Anthony</b>                  8:00 am Orthros                  9:00 am Divine Liturgy</p>	<p><b>18</b></p>
<p><b>19</b>                  8:45 am Orthros                  10:00 am Divine Liturgy</p>	<p><b>20</b>                  4:30 pm Adult Greek School Classes</p>	<p><b>21</b></p>	<p><b>22</b></p>	<p><b>23</b></p>	<p><b>24</b></p>	<p><b>25</b></p>
<p><b>26 8:45 am Orthros</b>                  10:00 am Divine Liturgy                  Chanters/Choir Practice                  Philoptochos                  Membership and Margaritas                  Chanters/Choir Practice</p>	<p><b>27</b>                  4:30 pm Youth and Adult Greek School Classes</p>	<p><b>28</b></p>	<p><b>29</b>                  5:00 pm Orthros                  6:00 pm Divine Liturgy (Three Holy Hierarchs Observed)</p>	<p><b>30 Three Hierarchs</b>                  (Observed Wednesday evening)</p>	<p><b>31</b></p>	

# The Desert Messenger

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## THE DESERT MESSENGER

### The Way of the Lord

*“For two thousand years Orthodoxy has been standing, awake, abiding in love, truth, justice, holiness. It does not cease, does not bend, does not bow to anything, is not afraid of anything, it cannot be defeated or subdued, it cannot be resisted. Orthodoxy is faith in the Gospel, in the commands of the Holy Apostles, in the canonical Apostolic succession.*

*It is necessary to proclaim to our neighbors the right faith of the Church, not only in words, but also by vivid examples. Orthodoxy is not dry knowledge, but personal experience. A personal perception of faith is a great wealth, an inexhaustible treasure, a source of joy and hope.”*

*- Elder Moses the Athonite*

