

• ST JOHN OF DAMASCUS ORTHODOX CHURCH •
12989 CR 1113, Tyler, TX 75703
Priest Report • January 30, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Glory to Jesus Christ!

*“I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?”
(The Wasteland 424-26).*

This is the last stanza of T.S. Eliot’s poem *The Wasteland* where the speaker finds himself sitting upon a shore, having come through a tumultuous time. As he sits contemplating, he asks himself the simple question, “Shall I at least set my lands in order?” I think of this poem often as a guide to life, really. The poem is full of a wide variety of “fragments” – wonderful memories, terrible fears, experiences, visions – which Eliot presents to the reader as a picture of life itself. The reader then must decide what is to be done.

Our life in the Church is essentially the same. We gather together with all the fragments of our lives, intending to “set our lands in order,” orienting ourselves toward Paradise and the life of the age to come. This past year has certainly been fragmented with all the joys and sorrows, fears and hopes, all the actions and uncertainties that life in the modern age can bring. But Eliot continues in his poem, “these fragments I have shored against my ruins.” As Christians, we also take all these fragments and offer them, as priests of creation, to God, who fills them with himself and being returned to us, they guard us from ruin.

In unprecedented times, it is more important than ever to live in this manner – to be priests of creation. In doing so, nothing is able to separate us from God. We find hope in everything, and being hopeful we find joy and the peace which passes understanding.

2021

Over the course of the last year, St. John’s has experienced a tremendous amount of movement. We baptized / chrismated twenty-two new faithful around Pascha and Pentecost. We have also seen a large influx of new inquirers, with twenty-five people (sixteen adults and nine children) currently participating in catechism this year.

We saw years of anticipation and preparations come to fruition as we installed the first part of our iconography program in the fall. We hope to move quickly in the next phase of fundraising and work to continue beautifying our Temple.

We endured fasting seasons and celebrated feasts as we do every year, being refined by our long endurance and faithfulness to the Church.

We also endured suffering and great sorrow with the loss of both Catherine Wilcox and Lani George. They have received a permanent place of rest here in our cemetery and they have become part of the permanence of St. John's. May God make their memory to be eternal!

These fragments and pieces of life all joined together here, creating the stable and life-giving reality of life in the Church. We have much to be hopeful for and we have much work to do. By our continued faithfulness, Orthodoxy becomes more and more embedded within us. Orthodoxy fills our vision of life and opens to us the possibility of Paradise. May God give us many more years to do this work with thanksgiving and joy.

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

I remain your servant in Christ,

Fr. David