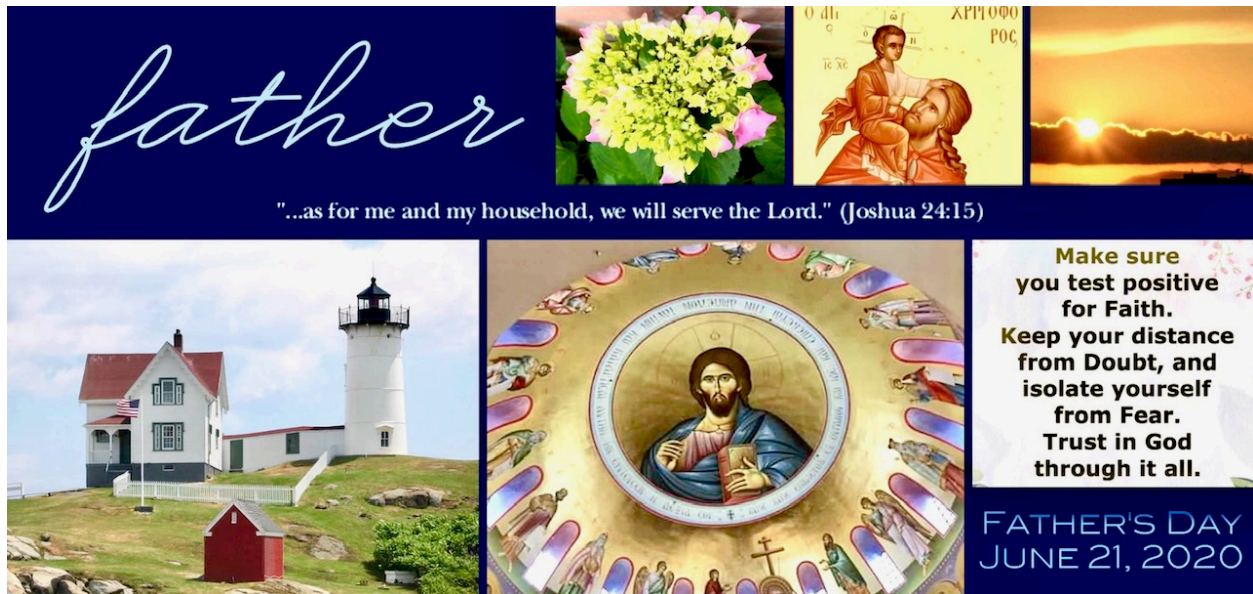


## Thanks be to God for the Gift of Fatherhood



First and foremost, as a beloved son of God, I feel a *father* honors his heavenly father when he keeps the words of the Prophet Joshua close to his heart, “*...as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.*” (Joshua 24:15) Many years ago, my sister-in-law, Presbyteria Lea Tsahakis framed this verse using her calligraphy skills as a house gift to my family. Ever since, these precious words have greeted every visitor who enters our front doorway. As a father, the Prophet’s verse reminds me that I am God’s servant and my household belongs to Him. He is the foundation of my life; with faith and love, I choose Him to lead us always!

The lighthouse photo below the word “father” in the composite image above is a cherished memory for Presbyteria Marinda, John, Andrew, Katie and me. While living in Boston during my theological training, we frequently took a Sunday afternoon drive to nearby York, Maine to see this classic New



England landmark. Both as a seminary student and now as a Priest, the lighthouse on the

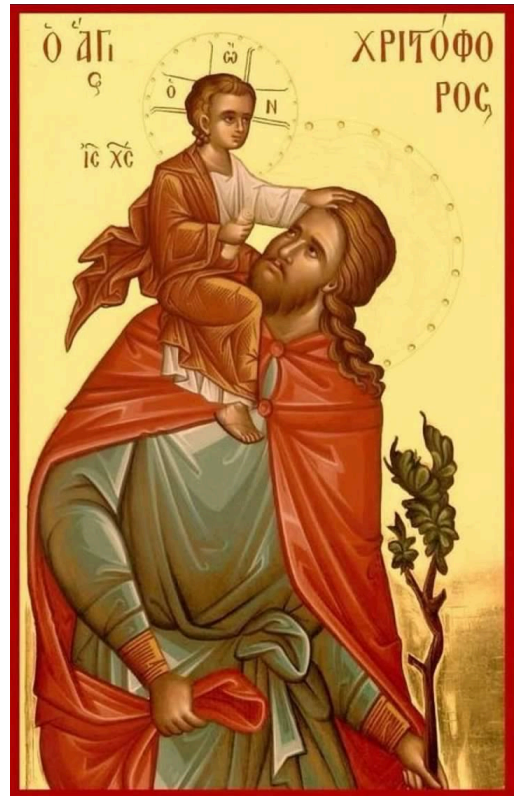
hill reinforces the Psalmist's verse in 119:105: *"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."* By trusting God to guide our daily path, we go forth with courage and confidence that He is always with us. The lighthouse projects illumination in a world that can be dark and menacing. Amidst the rocky shorelines of our lives, the teachings of our Lord are trustworthy and make us wise, just as the radiance from the lighthouse offers a path of safety to sailors in uncertain seas and ominous weather. *God's Word* gives rise to joy in the hearts of His children. It is the supplier of everlasting light to a father's eyes. It enables him to guide his wife and children in the abiding love and mercy of our Savior Jesus Christ.



The heart-shaped hydrangea next to the word "father" reminds me of the glorious love and devotion of my heavenly Father, which in turn was mirrored by my earthly father of blessed memory. I, too, have the same potential to offer unconditional and forgiving love to my spouse, my children, my friends, my co-workers, and all God places in my path.

Throughout history the hydrangea has been especially significant in Japan, where many believe the flower originated. According to a Japanese legend, the hydrangea became associated with heartfelt emotion, gratitude for understanding, and apology after a Japanese emperor gave them to the family of the girl he loved, to make up for neglecting her in favor of business and show how much he cared about her. Pink hydrangeas are especially associated with genuine emotion because their shape resembles a beating heart. Next to the hydrangea picture is the icon of St. Christopher, bearing the Christ child. God's calling to me as a father is to lift my children and grandchildren ever closer to God and labor together with my wife, relatives, and spiritual family to guide them to His eternal Kingdom. *As a father, God does not force me to do this. Instead, I respond to His unconditional love*

by *seeking* the Holy Spirit to guide my family to share in the fullness of life our Creator offers to all humanity. Just as St. Christopher found the Christ Child becoming heavier and heavier as he carried Him over the turbulent body of water one dark and stormy night, fathers can be confronted with overwhelming challenges to overcome to ensure the safety of our families. It is in those moments, as a son of God, we call out the Psalmist's words: *"O send out Your light and Your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your dwelling. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and I will praise You with the harp, O God, my God."* (Ps. 43:3-4)



Next to the icon of St. Christopher is an unforgettable sunset I experienced with Presbytera Marinda a few years ago when we traveled to my father's birthplace on the island of Crete in Greece. On our hotel balcony the night before we departed for home, we captured this sunset image. I always have felt it was God reminding me how proud my father of blessed memory

was that we made the pilgrimage to his homeland... a promise I made to him as a child and had just fulfilled with my beloved wife. As we thanked God for bringing us to meeting our family and making new friendships, we reflected that while earthly homecomings were exciting, how much more joyous will be our heavenly and everlasting homecoming when Christ returns at His Second and Glorious Coming... when He judges all who have ever lived and calls to His Kingdom His faithful sheep. As His son, I ask the Good Shepherd to carry me

and count me among His sheep; to enable me to fulfill my calling as an earthly father and yes, as a Spiritual Father to nurture and protect in His behalf.



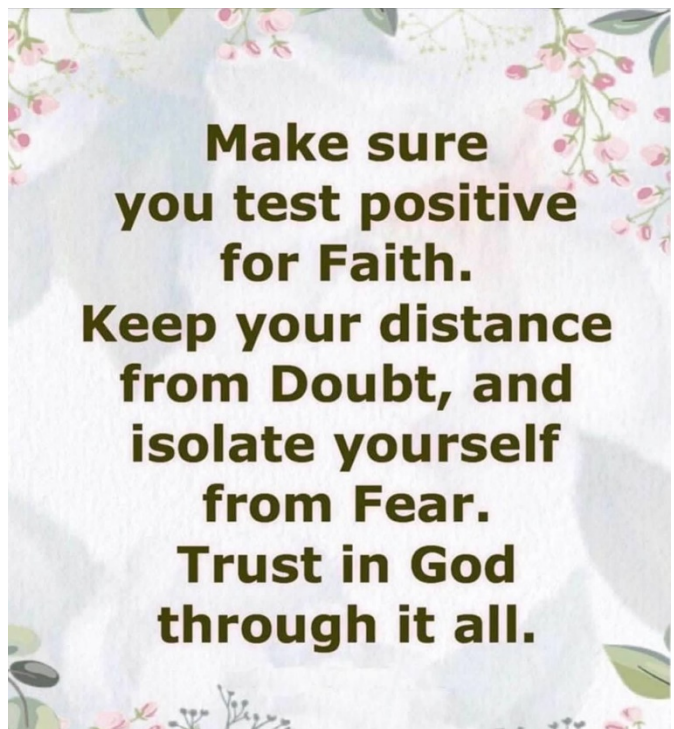
Toward that aim, I included in the composite image at the beginning of this reflection the icon of *Christ the Pantocrator, the Almighty, the Sustainer of the World* surrounded by His Heavenly Hosts. That vision is found in Revelation 1:8: *"I am the Alpha and the Omega", says the Lord God, Who is and Who was and Who is to come, the Almighty."*

On Father's Day, we honor fathers and celebrate fatherhood, paternal bonds, and the tremendous influence of fathers in our world. The fullness of God as Trinity is expressed by St. Paul in 1 Cor. 12:4-6: *"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God Who activates all of them in everyone."* Created in God's image and likeness, fathers are called to make use of His gifts to nurture, protect, guide, and inspire our families and the world at large. In so doing, we open God's Kingdom to those who live in darkness

and despair. We reconcile and heal them in His behalf. We join God and each other in peace, with love, offering forgiveness and mercy as His Holy Body. *“I will be your father, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”* (2 Cor. 6:18)

Fathers, God has given us the grace of fatherhood. St. Paul calls us to use this precious gift as a good steward who has been assigned by God Himself: *“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”* (Eph. 4:1-6)

Fathers, amidst the pandemic crisis and many obstacles and hardships that we are facing, let us keep in mind a spiritual strategy that will help us overcome any challenge. St. Paul used the following message to strengthen and encourage the Hellenic Christians living in Thessalonica some 2,000 years ago: *“For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at His coming? Is it not you? Yes, you are our glory and joy!”* (1 Thess. 2:19-20)



**Happy Father’s Day!**

**+Fr. George Tsahakis, 6.21.20**