

HOLY ARCHDIOCESE OF ATHENS
HOLY CHURCH OF SAINT JOHN THE HUNTER
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Dear Visitors.

It is a pleasure to welcome you at the Holy Temple of Saint John (the Baptist, or as it is in the area known) the Hunter; we wish you the blessing of the Holy Trinity always to guide you through life.

The parish of Saint John the Hunter is one of the most famous and oldest parishes of Athens, leading spiritually and serving for many years God's people.

Even before it became a parish, while it was a Metochion (= monastic property that lies away from the main monastery) of the Monastery of Saint John the Hunter on Mt. Himmitos, the old Temple attracted many pilgrims as it was famous. The old Temple was built in about the middle of the 15th century and it was dysipostatos (= it had two altars), dedicated to both Saint John the Baptist and Saint Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea. Probably in the 17th century the Church was decorated with frescos following the style of the popular art; the themes of the frescos were strictly chosen according to the Orthodox Iconographic tradition. During this period, services were held only on the days of the feasts by the Priest monks of the main Monastery, because there were no inhabitants in the area. Due to the fact that around the Temple there were only fields, it was named "Saint John of the fields".

In 1884, due to the existence of only eight families in the area, but also due to the fact that the Monastery of Saint John the Hunter of Himmitos ceased to exist, the small Church became the center of the new founded parish of Saint John the Hunter. The already acknowledged by the Orthodox Church as Saint, Nicolas Planas was appointed as its first priest. The Saint's personality and his way of life made not only him but his parish as well, famous. To that helped the urbanization of the area which reached its highest

level in 1922, after the Asia Minor destruction, when the Greek refugees coming from the cities of the ancient Ionia settled down and created another suburb of Athens.

Due to the city development and the numbers of the inhabitants living in the area of the parish, on the one hand more priests were appointed to it, on the other it was decided a new Church to be built. Unfortunately the old Church – that was built back in the 15th century – could not be saved and was demolished. Only the altar has been left, which nowadays can be observed on Vouliagmenis street, behind the altar of the new Church. In modern years during the procedure of widening the street, it was decided that the old altar was to be demolished; the destruction was avoided miraculously due to the fact that the machines on reaching the old altar went out of order or were turned off.

The new Holy Temple, named after Saint John the Baptist, was founded “on Sunday 4th of September 1955 by the priests of the Church Archimandrite Timotheos Katsigiannis, Archimandrite Athanasios Papadopoulos, Archimandrite Panagiotis Stasinopoulos, Economos Ioannis Dimopoulos and Rev. Antonios Gavalas, the Mayor of Dafni Mr Michalopoulos being present”, according to the relevant report of the Church Board. Due to its size, it took years for the Church to be completed. Thus the consecration of the Temple took place fifteen years later, “by His Eminence Vasilios, Bishop of Evripos on the 18th of October 1970, when the members of the Church Board were the following: Archpriest Antonios Gavalas, President, Mr Triantafillos Karatasakis, Mr Antonios Synodinos, Mr Ioannis Christeas, Mr Konstantinos Zigouras”, according to the marble inscription on the right side of the entrance of the Church. During the construction of the Athens’ Metro extended damages appeared on the west side of the Temple and in the basement; immediately an enormous renovation program began under the responsibility of the Attikon Metro Corporation which was completed in 2003, while President of the Church Board was the Archimandrite Grigorios Tsakalis.

The Holy Temple follows a special Byzantine style, that of the cross-shaped with a dome. The entrances are decorated by stylish stairs with

arches. Arches separate as well the narthex from the main Church. To the right of the narthex stairs lead to the basement where the Chapel of Saint Charalampos and the Board Office are to be found, as well as the parishional philanthropical hall wherein sixty (60) portions of well-prepared home-made food are daily distributed. The Temple was planned and constructed by the architect D. Konstas.

The Iconostas is a masterpiece of the famous woodcarver Theophilos Nomicos, who completed it in 1973. The frescos, with the exception of these above the altar, where painted by the famous painter D. Karousos and his assistant G. Pantazis. The Church is very well equipped, something that proves the affection and respect of the parishioners.

In our days the Parish of Saint John the Hunter fulfils its mission in the modern world by being a spiritual centre of prayer, mystical experiences and divine support, where God's people are served by the sacraments of Orthodoxy and the Holy Sermon. Beyond the everyday or the official services, in the Church a Scripture study is held weekly, as well as evening sermons and special services in honour of Saint John the Baptist and Saint Nicolas Planas, whose relics are kept as the most valuable treasure of the Parish. Of course, every year Sunday schools are organized for children and teenagers, while philanthropical activities are developed, such as financial support to families, medical support to everyone that is in need of it, distribution of packages during Christmas and Eastern etc.

Concluding this short presentation of our parish and its activities, on the one hand we would like to ask you to pray for all those who serve in it and volunteer to every activity; on the other hand we would like to wish you that the divined right hand of Saint John the Baptist, that during the Baptism touched the Head of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, may bless you and lead all your efforts to a fair result.

Text and translation: Archimandrite Hieronimos Nickolopoulos.