

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



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Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!



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31st Sunday after Pentecost-Feast of Theophany

Sunday, January 10, 2021



The focus of this great feast is the Lord's baptism in the river Jordan by St. John the Forerunner. Another name for the feast is Theophany, for it is shown—it is revealed at Jesus Christ's baptism—that He is the Son of God. Indeed, the Holy Trinity is revealed at His baptism, for the Father says, "This is my beloved Son in

whom I am well pleased," and the Holy Spirit descends upon Him in the form of a dove.

The meaning of the Feast of Christmas is fulfilled at Theophany, for now it is made clear that the One born in Bethlehem is truly God, come to restore our fallen nature and to renew the entire creation by uniting humanity with divinity in Himself. And even as the Son of God entered our world at His birth, He now enters the flowing water of a river in order to make it holy, in order to bring His blessing and fulfillment upon the world that He created.

For the entire creation was subjected to futility because of the rebellion of our first parents. As St. Paul wrote to the Romans, "the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now" for it also "will be of
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*Theophany-Baptism of the Lord *
** St. Gregory of Nyssa **

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

Gospel: Matthew 3: 13-17

St. George Orthodox Christian Church is a community of believers who strive to live a life according to the Gospel of Christ and teachings of the Church.

We worship God in Trinity -
Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

We are dedicated to living out Christ's commandment to, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, ad with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*

Homily on Theophany, by St. Proclus of Constantinople

Christ appeared in the world, and, bringing beauty out of disarray, gave it luster and joy. He bore the world's sins and crushed the world's enemy. He sanctified the fountains of waters and enlightened the minds of men. Into the fabric of miracles, he interwove ever greater miracles.

For on this day land and sea share between them the grace of the Savior, and the whole world is filled with joy. Today's feast of the Theophany manifests even more

wonders than the feast of Christmas.

On the feast of the Savior's birth, the earth rejoiced because it bore the Lord in a manger; but on today's feast of the Theophany, it is the sea that is glad and leaps for joy; the sea is glad because it receives the blessing of holiness in the river Jordan.

At Christmas we saw a weak baby, giving proof of our weakness. In today's feast, we see a perfect man, hinting at the perfect Son who pro-

ceeds from the all-perfect Father. At Christmas the King puts on the royal robe of his body; at Epiphany the very source enfolds and, as it were, clothes the river.

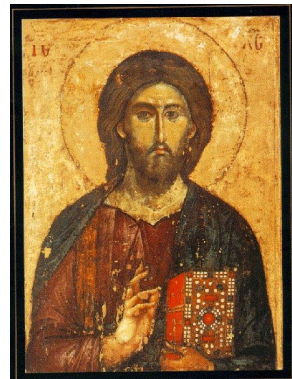
Come then and see new and astounding miracles: the Sun of righteousness washing in the Jordan, fire immersed in water, God sanctified by the ministry of man.

Today every creature shouts in resounding song: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

If you have any questions about the church or would like to speak with our pastor, please call Fr. Matthew at 607-280-1586

Glory be to
Jesus Christ.
Glory be
Forever.





Troparion to St. George

As the deliverer
of captives
and defender
of the poor,
healer of the infirm
and champion of kings,
victorious great
martyr George
intercede with Christ
our God
for our souls
salvation.

News and Notes

We welcome all who are worshiping with us today. Because of COVID-19, our social hour has been canceled until we receive further instructions from the Department of Health.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Evan, Ryan, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Paula, Laura, Elizabeth Matthew, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Thoughts on the Faith

By Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev)

Let us also not become bored when we commemorate the living and the departed in church and hear the listing of their names during the liturgy. It is not boring for God to hear these names again and again, because behind each name is a hu-

man life.

Each name represents a person who was created by God in His image and likeness and for whom God came into this world in order to grant salvation. Every name reminds us of a specific person who struggles for his own salvation and for the salvation of his neighbors, standing at the crossroad between good and evil. And the names of the departed speak to us about those people who have lived through this earthly life and have crossed over into another world — some with faith, others without faith.

Some have departed full of virtues and the fruits of good deeds and others without having acquired these fruits. Christians are called upon to pray for all people, living and departed. We must understand that if we approach these names which are read in church with reverence, then our names will also be recorded by the Lord himself in the Book of Life. If we don't pray for each other, then it is possible that our names will be crossed out from this Book. "Remember us O, Lord, when You come into Your Kingdom.

Homily on Theophany, cont'd from p. 1) Homily on Theophany by St. John of Shaghai and San Francisco

Lord. Blessed is he who comes in every age, for this is not his first coming. And who is he? Tell us more clearly, I beg you, blessed David: The Lord is God and has shone upon us.

David is not alone in prophesying this; the apostle Paul adds his own witness, saying: The grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all men, and instructing us. Not for some men, but for all. To Jews and Greeks alike God bestows salvation through baptism, offering baptism as a common grace for all.

Come, consider this new and wonderful deluge, greater and more important than the flood of Noah's day. Then the water of the flood destroyed the human race, but now the water of Baptism has recalled the dead to life by the power of the one who baptized.

In the days of the flood the dove with an olive branch in its beak foreshadowed the fragrance of the good odor of Christ the Lord; now the Holy Spirit, in the likeness of a dove reveals the Lord of mercy. Amen.

* * *
By His immersion in the Jordan, Christ sanctified not only the waters of the Jordan, but the whole nature of the waters, as the Church cries out in its hymns: "Christ hath appeared in the Jordan to sanctify the waters" (troparion of the forefeast); "Today the nature of the waters is sanctified" (troparion at the Blessing



of the Waters). Since there is water everywhere, by sanctifying the waters, Christ thereby sanctified all of creation and the entire universe. Christ prepared nature that it, too, might experience the beneficial consequences of the sacrifice that He came to offer.

But this was not yet everything. He

gave the waters the power to cleanse human sin. The baptism of John was only a sign of repentance. Christian Baptism is a new birth and the forgiveness of all sins. God punished the sin of the first world with water, destroying it in a flood of waters. Now God saves people with water in the Mystery of Baptism.

Thus, as we sing in the hymns of the Church, Christ crushed the head of the serpent in the waters of the Jordan, the head of that same serpent that deceived Adam and Eve but was defeated by the humility of Jesus. He sanctified the waters, preparing all of creation, along with the waters, to receive the word of forgiveness and to prepare it for incorruption. Then, having withstood another battle with the devil in the wilderness, Christ began His preaching with these words: *Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* (Matthew 4:17).

Now the Lord Himself cries out to people: "Repent!" Christ addressed all people of every time and age. So we must do likewise and repent.

(Homily on the Feast of Theophany, cont'd from p.1)

“will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

The good news of the gospel is that the Creator has become part of the creation in order to make it a new heaven and a new earth. We see at Theophany that nothing is intrinsically profane or cut off from the blessing and holiness of God. All things, physical and spiritual, visible and invisible, are called to participate in the divine glory that our Lord has brought to the world, to become part of the new heaven and earth of God's kingdom.

Christ's baptism demonstrates that we, too, are saved along with the rest of the creation, for it is through the water that we share in His life. “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.” In baptism, we receive the garment of light that Adam and Eve lost when they distorted themselves and the entire creation with sin and death. The incarnate Son of God sanctified our flesh and blood at His birth, and at His baptism He sanctifies the water through which our calling as those created in the divine image and likeness is fulfilled.

When we bless water at the Divine liturgy today, we will participate in our Lord's healing of all reality, for holy water is a sign that every dimension of creation is to be sanctified, to become holy by the fulfillment of God's original purposes for it. Even though we pollute it and it is sometimes our enemy in storms and floods in the world as know it, God created water to sustain us and to bring life to the world. Christ has restored water to its intended purpose by making it holy through His baptism, which is a sign of His intention for every dimension of the universe that He spoke into existence.

When you have your Theophany house blessing, the priest will sprinkle holy water in every room of your house, which is a sign of God's blessing upon even the small details of our daily lives. It is also a calling to

sanctify every aspect of our life and to recognize that every dimension of who we are as human beings is to be baptized into Christ, dying to sin and rising with Him in holiness. True Christianity is not escape from the world or simply a matter of emotion or morality. No, we are called to become like God, to participate in His infinite holiness to the depths of our souls in every thought, word, and deed.

So this Theophany, we should become like the water that we will bless later in the service. That means responding to Jesus Christ's

great blessing of the world such that we share in His life and become more fully who He created us to be in the first place in the image and likeness of God.

No, none of this is magic. If we do not cooperate with our Lord's mercy by repentance and growth in holiness, holy water will do us no good. But if in humility and faith we thirst for the fulfillment of our daily lives in Christ, then drinking and being sprinkled with holy water will nourish us spiritually just like water revives a shriveled plant on a hot, dry day.

Theophany makes it possible for us to quench our thirst for holiness, for the divine life for which for which we were made. This is the joyful, blessed life of the Holy Trinity that Jesus Christ has brought to the world. This Epiphany, let us all stop dying of thirst for God and instead be filled to overflowing by the mercy, presence, and power of the Lord. And then, like well-watered and nourished

plants, we will flourish and bear good fruit for the Kingdom of God.

From the Vespers of Theophany

A servant baptized our Redeemer and the coming of the Spirit bore witness to Him. The hosts of Angels saw this and shook with fear. And the voice of the Father was heard from heaven: “The One on Whom the Forerunner lays his hand, He is My beloved Son; I am well pleased in Him.” O Christ our God, glory to You!



Sanctify the Waters by Fr. John Breck

St. Mark begins his Gospel not with Jesus' birth, but with his baptism at the hands of his cousin John. This is the true "epiphany," the moment that represents the manifestation to the world of the eternal Son of God. For before his baptism, as St John Chrysostom notes, "he was not known to the people." As both Scripture and the iconic tradition of the Church attest, that manifestation was a Trinitarian theophany, in which the baptism of the Son was accompanied by the voice of the Father and the appearance of the Holy Spirit "in the form of" a dove, or more precisely, "coming down [upon Jesus] like a dove."

When we, as Orthodox Christians, attempt to explain the significance of this feast, we normally stress two closely related themes. On the one hand, God reveals himself as a tri-unity of divine Persons, a revelation that will be repeated in modified form at Jesus' Transfiguration.

Thereby Jesus is revealed to be "one of the Holy Trinity," the eternal Son of God who took upon himself fallen human nature in order to glorify that nature and to restore human persons to the life, the perfection and the beauty for which they were originally created. At the same time, Jesus by his baptism enacts and establishes the sacramental ritual by which believers can share in his death and rise with him "in newness of life" (Rom 6:3-4), uniting themselves to his glorified Body, the Church.

There is another aspect of Theophany that also needs to be stressed, today perhaps more than ever before. This is a motif that appears very clearly in icons of the feast but

goes unmentioned in the Gospels. Its earliest formulation seems to be that of St Ignatius of Antioch, who died as a martyr in Rome between 110 and 117 AD. In his letter to the Ephesians, Ignatius makes a statement notoriously difficult to translate: "Our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary according to the plan of God from the seed of David [cf. Rom 1:3] and [by] the Holy Spirit; he was born and was baptized so that by the passion, he might purify the water."

Without going into the difficulties presented by the language of this verse, we can note its basic theme. It is the same as depicted in icons and liturgical hymns of the Theophany feast. Christ descends into the waters of the Jordan not only to submit himself to the hands of John and to lay the foundation for the sacramental act of baptism. He

also goes down into the Jordan in order to purify or sanctify those waters, and in so doing he symbolically (really, through this sign-act) sanctifies all of creation.

Theophany celebrates the baptismal renewal of God's people, members of the Body of Christ. But it also provides the perspective we are to assume with regard to the entire created world. Stated otherwise, it provides the foundation for a genuinely Christian "ecology."

Elizabeth Theokritoff has written a book entitled, *Living in God's Creation*, with the subtitle "The Ecological Vision of Orthodox Christianity." One theme the book stresses is of particular importance in this time of Theophany. The author points out that our relation to the created world is less that of "steward" than it is of priest. We are called not only to preserve and care for the created order.

Our vocation relative to the world we live in, both natural and human, is to make of it an offering to God, with the ongoing supplication that he bless, restore and make fruitful this planet over which he has granted us dominion. That dominion implies responsibility and respect toward all living things. But it means, too, that we recognize the "fallenness" of creation and its need for restoration, even redemption (Rom 8:18-23).

If that renewal is to be realized, particularly with today's ecological precariousness, it requires not only a thoroughgoing transformation in the way we see the world and make use of it. It requires above all that we, as baptized members of Christ's Body, accept our priestly calling to

offer this world to its Creator and Lord, never ceasing to call down his blessing and grace upon it and upon each of its inhabitants.

Jesus submitted himself to baptism in order to identify with each of us, held as we are in bondage to sin and death, and to enable us to die and rise with him in newness of life, leading to life everlasting. Yet he also descended into the baptismal waters in order to bless and sanctify those waters. Thereby he demonstrated the truth that the Holy Trinity, manifest at his baptism, loves and cares for all of creation. And he calls us to assume the same attitude of loving concern, to acquire an "ecological vision" that scraps our habitual utilitarian exploitation of the environment in favor of an awe-filled wonder at the beauty and value inherent in the world that God has made.

