

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!

Volume 12 Issue 548

30th Sunday after Pentecost-Theophany-the Baptism of Christ

January 8, 2023



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 Ho-

ly 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 delivered from the bondage of

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++ 30th Sunday after Pentecost ++

+ St. George the Chozebite +

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.*

A Talk on the Divine Liturgy, Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol (part 13)

As the Old Testament tells us, in ancient times, man served God by building stone altars and sacrificing animals on them (cf., for example, Gen. 8:20, 12:7-8). This is how they worshiped before the Mosaic Law.

After God gave the Law to Moses, the Tabernacle of Meeting appeared, where they kept the relics of the Israelite people: the tablets of the Covenant, the vessel with manna, Aaron's budding rod, and some other sacred items.

When the people of

God, Israel, entered into the Promised Land, King Solomon built a temple according to the desire of the whole of the people. He built the Temple as directed by God. It was precisely in this place, in the Temple, that the Jews, and only them, served the true God.

When our Savior Jesus Christ suffered the Crucifixion, the Mosaic Law was abolished, and the Jewish people lost the Kingdom of God (cf. Mt. 21:43). Then God established His people, His nation—the nation of the

Church, the nation of Christians, surpassing all earthly nations and peoples.

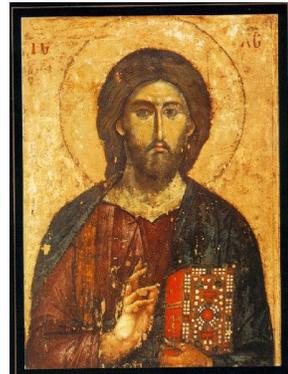
After the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, in the first years of the existence of the Christian Church, Christians continued going to Solomon's Temple together with the Jewish faithful. There they studied the Mosaic Law, sang Psalms and praised God, and at the end of the Temple service, they would gather in the home of one of the faithful

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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.





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 that our souls
may be saved.

News and Notes

We welcome all who are worshipping with us today. We are also happy to announce that coffee social has resumed following the Divine Liturgy.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

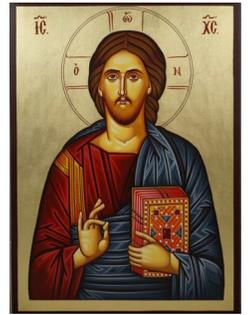
Please keep the following in your prayers: Mother Onufria, Fr. Michael, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, Joanne, Sesu, Skip, Georgia, Chuck, Pam, Colleen, Stan, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

St. Hippolytus of Rome on Theophany

Do you see, beloved, how many and how great blessings we would have lost, if the Lord had yielded to the exhortation of John, and declined baptism? For the heavens were shut before this; the region above was inaccessible. We would in that case descend to the lower parts, but we would not ascend to the upper. But was it only that the Lord was baptized? He also renewed the old man, and committed to

him again the sceptre of adoption. For straightway “the heavens were opened to Him.”

A reconciliation took place of the visible with the invisible; the celestial orders were filled with joy; the diseases of earth were healed; secret things were made known; those at enmity were restored to amity. For you have heard the word of the evangelist, saying, “The heavens were opened to Him,” on account of three wonders. For when Christ the Bridegroom was baptized, it was meet that heaven should open its brilliant gates. And in like manner also, when the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove, and the Father’s voice spread everywhere, it was meet that “the gates of heaven should be lifted up.” (Ps 24: 7) “And, lo, the heavens were opened to Him; and a voice was heard, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”



A Talk on the Divine Liturgy, cont'd from p.1

and celebrate the Divine Eucharist, communing of the Body and Blood of Christ. However, this situation didn’t last very long. Christianity began to receive other peoples too, who were forbidden to enter Solomon’s Temple. Therefore, Christians were forced to separate from Jewish worship. At first they would gather in homes, where they would pray, study the Law of God, and serve the Divine Eucharist.

Very soon the Church entered the period of persecution and was considered illegal for nearly three centuries. A huge number of Christians suffered at this time. According to the martyrologies, there were at least about 11 million martyrs in the first three centuries of persecutions. In just one day, 20,000 Christians were burned alive in Nicomedia. What did Christians do when they were persecuted? They gathered in tombs, in cemeteries. Whoever’s been to Rome has seen the catacombs—Christian sepulchers and at the same time, places of prayerful gatherings.

We also have catacombs here in Cyprus, for example, in Paphos (the Catacombs of St. Solomon). They would bury Christian martyrs in the catacombs, and then the faithful would celebrate the Eucharist over their graves. We have to have an altar to celebrate the Eucharist, and in the catacombs, the tombstones were used as altars.

The first three centuries passed, and St. Constantine ascended the imperial throne and ended the persecutions. The Church came out of the catacombs. What did it begin to do? To build churches over the tombs of the martyrs. If you go to the Monastery of St. Heraclius,² you’ll see the saint’s tomb under the church. This is exactly how the *matyria* were built in ancient times—churches over the graves of the martyrs. Christians built churches everywhere.

That’s when there arose the rite for consecrating a place where the ministry to God would be performed—the rite of consecrating the holy altar.

Today, in addition to Holy Chrism,

we also use the relics of martyrs in the consecration of the altar in a newly-built church, thereby following the ancient Church tradition of building churches on the relics and blood of the martyrs.

The bishop who celebrates the consecration (I must say that only a hierarch has the right to consecrate a church and altar) brings a small reliquary with a particle of the relics of holy martyrs with him. Entering the church, the bishop enters the altar and places the reliquary on the site reserved for it. A candle is lit before the relics. Vespers is served, with Matins the next day.



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(Homily on the Baptism of the Lord, cont'd from p.1)

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.

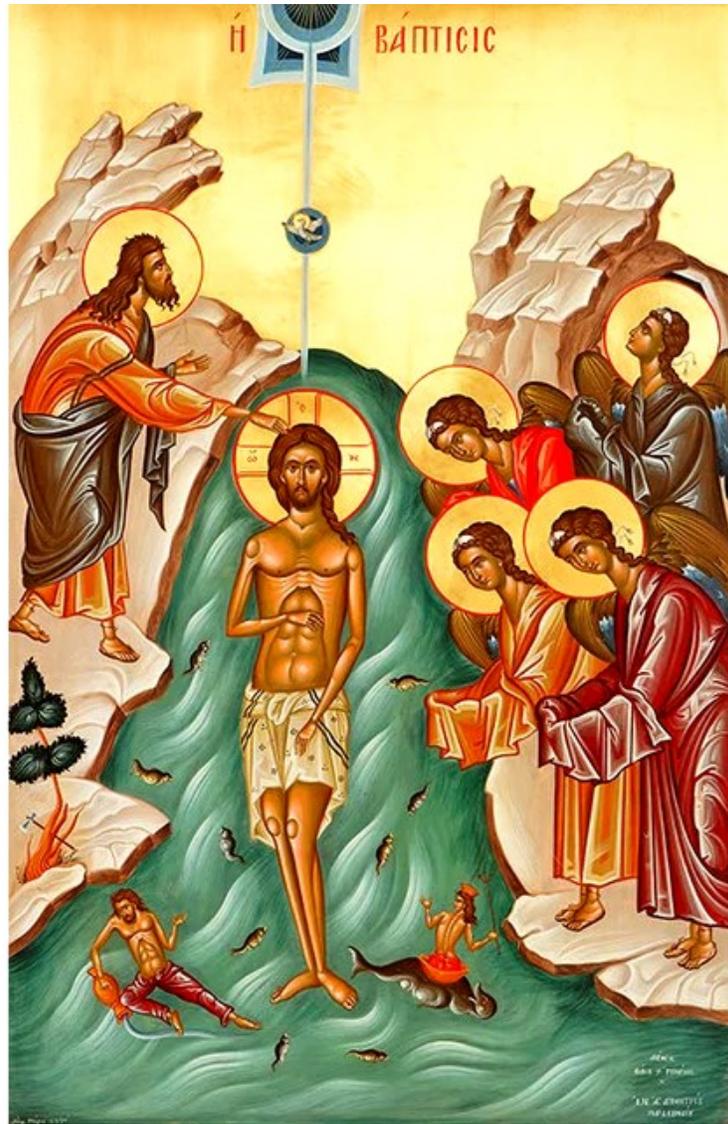
When we bless water at the conclusion of liturgy today, we will participate in our Lord’s healing of all reality, for holy water is a sign that every dimension of creation is to be sanctified, to become holy by the fulfillment of God’s original purposes for it. Even though we pollute it and it is sometimes 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 Epiphany house blessing this year, I 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. Amen.



Troparion for the Feast

When You, O Lord, were baptized in the Jordan, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest. For the voice of the Father bore witness to You, and called You His beloved Son; and the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the truthfulness of His word. O Christ our God, You have revealed Yourself and have enlightened the world, glory to You.

Theophany is the Feast which reveals the Most Holy Trinity to the world through the Baptism of the Lord (Mt.3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). God the Father spoke from Heaven about the Son, the Son was baptized by Saint John the Forerunner, and the Holy Spirit descended upon the Son in the form of a dove. From ancient times this Feast was called the Day of Illumination and the Feast of Lights, since God is Light and has appeared to illumine "those who sat in darkness," and "in the region of the shadow of death" (Mt.4:16), and to save the fallen race of mankind by grace.

In the ancient Church it was the custom to baptize catechumens at the Vespers of Theophany, so that Baptism also is revealed as the spiritual illumination of mankind.

The origin of the Feast of Theophany goes back to Apostolic times, and it is mentioned in The Apostolic Constitutions (Book V:13). From the second century we have the testimony of Saint Clement of Alexandria concerning the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord, and the night vigil before this Feast.

There is a third century dialogue about the services for Theophany between the holy martyr Hippolytus and Saint Gregory the Wonderworker. In the following centuries, from the fourth to ninth century, all the great Fathers of the Church: Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan, John of Damascus, commented on the Feast of Theophany.

8th century monks composed much liturgical music for this Feast, which is sung at Orthodox services even today. Saint John of Damascus said that the Lord was baptized, not because He Himself had need for cleansing, but "to bury human sin by water," to fulfill the Law, to reveal the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and finally, to sanctify "the nature of water" and to offer us the form and example of Baptism.

On the Feast of the Baptism of Christ, the Holy Church proclaims our faith in the most sublime mystery, incomprehensible to human intellect, of one God in three Persons. It teaches us to confess and glorify the Holy Trinity, one in Essence and Undivided. It exposes and overthrows the errors of ancient teachings which attempted to explain the Creator of the world by reason, and in human terms.

The Church shows the necessity of Baptism for be-

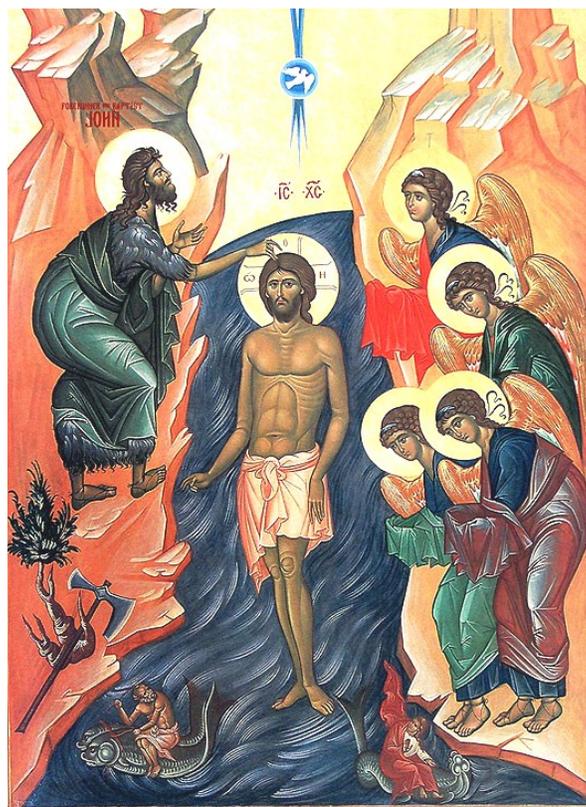
lievers in Christ, and it inspires us with a sense of deep gratitude for the illumination and purification of our sinful nature. The Church teaches that our salvation and cleansing from sin is possible only by the power of the grace of the Holy Spirit, therefore it is necessary to preserve worthily these gifts of the grace of holy Baptism, keeping clean this priceless garb, for "As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27). On the day of Theophany, all foods are permitted, even if the Feast falls on a Wednesday or Friday.

A few other notes about the Icon:

At the top the Holy Spirit is descending upon Jesus as a dove, the Holy Spirit is depicted in a Mandorla. In this manner, The Father, using His own pre-eternal and

consubstantial and subra-celestial Spirit as His finger, crying out and point from heaven, openly declared and proclaimed to all that the one then being baptized by John in the Jordan was His beloved Son, while at the same time manifesting His unity with Him." (St. Gregory Palamas, Homily 60.15). St. John Chrysostom also emphasizes that the Gospels state the Heavens were opened, the Spirit descends upon us so that we can ascend with Christ and the Spirit to the Father in Heaven. For the first time since the fall of mankind, the Heavens were opened to us. The angels on the right side are waiting to attend and dress him after the baptism is over.

St. John the Baptist, while baptizing Jesus is usually turned away or looking at the Spirit descending upon Christ. This signifies that Theophany is about elevating



Jesus Christ. There is an axe near John the Baptist, which reflects his warning that our lives must bear the fruit of the Spirit or else we will be removed. We cannot get comfortable or spiritually lazy. Jesus is not submerged in the water, for creation was baptized in Him, not vice versa.

Lastly, the strange little creatures riding fish at the bottom represent the Jordan River and the Sea, both fleeing at the sight of something much bigger and greater than themselves entering the water. As the Psalms say: Psalm 73:14 –Thou did establish the sea by Thy might, Thou did break the heads of the dragons. Psalm 76:15 – The waters saw Thee, O God, the waters saw Thee and were afraid; the abysses were troubled. Psalm 113:3 – The sea beheld and fled, [the River] Jordan turned back.