

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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29th Sunday after Pentecost–The Feast of Theophany

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Some people think of religion as a way of escaping the problems of life in the “real world.” They may view our physical bodies and their weaknesses, as well as all the problems that people and societies have in relating to one another, as evil or pointless realities from which they hope God will deliver us. Perhaps they want an imaginary spiritual bliss of not having to put up

with others or with the other challenges that life in the created world presents. That hope may fit with the sensibilities of some and even be appealing to us at times, but it has nothing to do with the God Who revealed Himself as the Holy Trinity when Christ was baptized by St. John in the Jordan for our salvation.

Think for a moment about how the Holy Trinity is manifested. Jesus Christ submits to the baptism of St. John the Forerunner in a river full of water. When the Lord comes out of the water, the voice of the Father identifies Him as His Beloved Son and the Holy Spirit descends upon Him in the form of a dove. Instead of escaping the creation or rescuing us from it, God enters into it. The Son lowers Himself into a river and gets as wet as anyone else who did so. The deepest
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**** 29th Sunday after Pentecost ****

Theophany of Our Lord & Savior

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.*

Time and the New Year, by Fr. Vasileios Kalliakmanis

In every age, people want to measure, monitor and confer value on time, and, if at all possible, to surpass its limits. This can be seen from the monuments of world civilization, as well as from some of the notions which have been expressed regarding them. For the peoples outside the Bible and in secular religions, mythological views have developed on the sacredness and recycling properties of time. And so, the concept arose that time recycles

itself. This was the view that dominated Ancient Greek thought.

In the pre-Christian period a variety of festal cycles arose. The first of each month, the first day of the year, the equinoxes, the solstices, and other important events were grounds for celebration. In the Old Testament, Saturday, the Sabbath, which was linked to the seventh day of creation when the Lord rested “from all His works”, acquired a profound festal symbolism. The num-

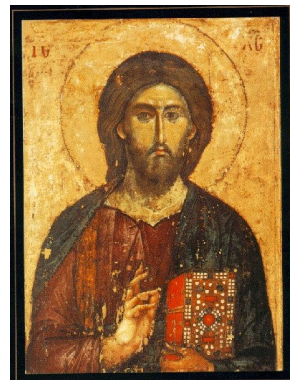
ber seven, considered within the weekly cycle, symbolized the completion of creation and, at the same time, the secular time of the week.

But the religious formality of the Sabbath day of rest, as well as of the other feasts, robbed them of their human content. This is why the Word of God, through the Prophet Isaiah was censorious: “My soul hates your New Moons and Sabbaths... Learn to do good, seek justice and
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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 worshipping with us today and invite you down to the church hall for our social hour.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

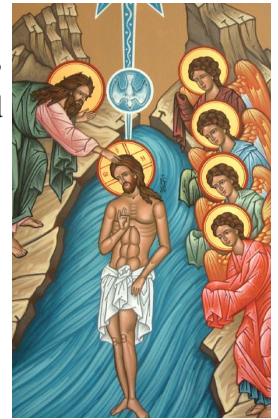
We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Lillian, Meg, Larissa, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Lorraine, Peg, Christopher, Jackie, Karoline, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Andrea, Samuel, Anatoly, Linda, Alexey, Eric, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Sally Lou, Bob, Catherine, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, and those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Words of wisdom from the Elders

Christ is illumined, let us shine forth with Him. Christ is baptized, let us descend with Him that we may also ascend with Him. Jesus is baptized; but we must attentively consider not only this but also some other points. Who is He, and by whom is He baptized, and at what time? He the All-pure; and He is baptized by John; and the time is the beginning of His

miracles. What are we to learn and to be taught by this? To purify ourselves first; to be lowly minded; and to preach only in maturity both of spiritual and bodily stature. (St. Gregory Nazianzen, Oration on the Holy Lights)

He as God of all gave strength to me, weak as a mortal, as He said: 'Hold out your hand and I shall give you strength.' For how would I have had the power unless the very thing happened which He said would take place? How would I have had the ability to baptize the abyss, Since I am mortal, Had I not first received and claimed power from on high? For I realize now that He is standing by me That I am greater than I was formerly. I am something different, I am changed, glorified, As I behold and baptize The unapproachable Light. (St Romanos the Melodist - On the Baptism of Christ)



Time and the New Year (continued from p. 1)

Assist the downtrodden” (Is. 1, 13 ff.). The Church shifted the central focus from Saturday to Sunday, which is at once the first and eighth day of the week, and thus opened the way into the milieu of the grace and kingdom of God. And the principal day of the resurrection became the weekly Easter.

For Christians, months, years, centuries and millennia are in the hands of the Lord Almighty. It is He Who governs it and leads to eternity, since He is without beginning and eternal Himself. Scripture teaches us: “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end” (Heb. 1, 13 ff.).

In the Church calendar, through the cultivation of memory, all these acts of salvation are highlighted, in which God came into history for the re-

demption of humankind. The Nativity, the Circumcision, the Reception in the Temple, the Baptism, the Transfiguration, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, are experienced as events happening in the present. We also celebrate the memory of friends



of Christ: the saints, the righteous, the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, the hierarchs, the blessed, and the new martyrs who pleased God and loved their fellow human beings in dark and difficult times.

The Church manifests what God has done for His creation, but also what

people can achieve when they are illumined by the Holy Spirit and inspired by the love of God. Even though Christians make the wish for “Many, Good and Peaceful Years”, they do not consider time to be the supreme good. They consider it a time for struggle and spiritual exercise, since they pray for the rest of their lives to be spent in peace and repentance.

With the assistance of the Comforter, in the present time, we prepare for participation in the Paradise of God’s love. People who place their lives in the hands of God and observe His commandments do not fear the future. They are inspired by the faith of the prophets, the apostles and the saints of the past, struggle to gain the experience of love in the present and retain a lively hope of their participation in the future kingdom and glory. Then they can turn to Him Who is the “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” and say to Him “Yes, Come Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22, 13).

mystery of the universe, that God is the Holy Trinity, is proclaimed in relation to what happened in a river full of water.

The Savior was not baptized as a sign of His own repentance, of course, for He had no sins of which to repent. Instead, He makes the water holy by entering into it, by restoring the entire creation to its right relationship with God. As the God-Man, He descended into the world that He spoke into existence in order to free it from subjection to futility and fulfill it as an icon of His salvation.

We, of course, are part of that creation in every dimension of our existence, both as particular persons and in relation to one another. Recall the nakedness of Adam and Eve when they turned away from God, for they stripped themselves of the divine glory by repudiating their calling to become ever more like God in holiness. They diminished themselves and the entire creation by serving their self-centered desires instead of the Lord. They brought death and slavery to our passions into the world, which we see so vividly when their son Cain murdered their son Abel.

Our Savior entered fully into our distorted world of brokenness and pain in order to set it right. He was baptized in the Jordan in order to clothe the naked Adam, in order to restore us to the dignity of those who wear the robe of light of His beloved sons and daughters. We put Him on in baptism like a garment. By His mercy and grace, we participate personally in His healing and blessing of every aspect of our humanity. He does not call us to flee from His world, but to be so united with Him in holiness that we play our unique parts in fulfilling His gracious purposes for it. He invites us to become like Him as partakers in the divine nature by grace. That is really simply what it means to be a human being in the divine image and likeness.

As part of the celebration of the feast, we bless houses with holy water, which was blessed at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on the day of the feast. By entering into the water, the Lord made the water holy, which means that He restored and fulfilled its very nature. We need water in order to live. The earth needs water in order to become fertile, bearing fruit and giving life to animals of all kinds. We wash with water and use it to

maintain cleanliness and health. Without water, we become weak and die, as do other creatures. And in the world as we know it, water can kill us through floods and storms. Since the creation has been subjected to futility through the sin of human beings, the very water through which God gives us life may become the means of our death.

The good news is that our Lord has made even death an entrance into life. When we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized into His death. When we put Him on in baptism, we died to sin and rose with Him in holiness, regaining the robe of light and being restored to our intended place in the creation in God's image and likeness. When we bless holy water, we restore water to its intended place, to its original role in giving life and cleansing impurities. These are fulfilled in baptism, by which the Lord shares His eternal life with us and washes away our corruption. Here we see the purpose of water, and the creation itself, fulfilled.

When we bless a home, or anything else, with holy water, God restores it to its natural state, to its place in fulfilling God's purposes in the creation. And since our homes are where we and our families live each day, how could we not want that blessing on our family and the physical space where we offer our lives to the Lord? When this blessing, we join what is most important to us to Christ's healing and restoration of the entire universe.

We cannot stop there, however, for we must actually live as those who have put on a robe of light, who have entered into the fulfillment of all things in Christ. We must make all of our lives an epiphany, a manifestation of God's gracious purposes.

We will not find salvation in isolation, but as persons united in holy love who share a common life in Christ. It is revealed at Christ's baptism that He is the Son of the Father. That is a relationship of holy love beyond our full understanding. To be in loving relationship with others is a key dimension of what it means to be a human being in the divine image and likeness. When we bless our homes, we find strength to make our entirety the fulfillment of God's gracious purposes. We celebrate this great feast by offering every dimension of our lives to the Lord such that we become living epiphanies of His salvation in the world as we know it.



The Feast of Theophany

The Feast of the Holy Theophany (Epiphany) of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ is celebrated each year on January 6. The Feast commemorates the Baptism of Christ and the divine revelation of the Holy Trinity. At the Baptism of Christ, all three Persons of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—were made manifest. Thus, the name of the Feast is Epiphany, meaning manifestation, or Theophany, meaning manifestation of God.

Biblical Story

The Biblical story of the Baptism of Christ is recorded in all four of the Gospels: Matthew 3, Mark 1:1-9, Luke 3:21-22, and John 1:31-34. John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus and the one chosen by God to proclaim His coming, was preaching in the wilderness and was baptizing all who would respond to his message calling for repentance. As he was doing this, John was directing the people toward the one who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11).

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. Initially, John would not do this, saying that Jesus should baptize him. Jesus said to John, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness (3:15). John consented and baptized Jesus.

When Jesus came up from the water, the heavens opened suddenly, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. The Bible records that the Spirit descended like a dove and alighted on him. When this happened, a voice came from heaven and said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." This was the voice of God the Father.

Christ's baptism in the Jordan was "theophany," a manifestation of God to the world, because it was the beginning of our Lord's public ministry. It was also a "theophany" in that the world was granted a revelation of the Holy Trinity. All three Persons were made manifest together: the Father testified from on high to the divine Sonship of Jesus; the Son received His Father's testimony; and the Spirit was seen in the form of a dove, descending from the Father and resting upon the Son.

The theme of "manifestation" or "revelation" is also

expressed in Scripture with the symbolism of light. In the hymn of the Feast we sing, "Christ has appeared and enlightened the world." Thus, January 6 is also known as the Feast of Lights. The Church celebrates on this day the illumination of the world by the light of Christ.

Icon of the Feast

The Icon of the Feast of Theophany tells the story from the Gospels in images and color. On the left side of the icon we see John the Baptist who is dressed in camel's hair and has the appearance of one who lives in the wilderness. His arms are outstretched, showing an attitude of prayer and reverence, but also directing others to Christ. With his right hand he is conducting the baptism. Saint John the Baptist conducts the Baptism of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Heavens open, the voice of the Father is heard, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descends upon Christ. In the center of the icon is Christ being baptized in the Jordan. He is standing in the water wearing a waistcloth, and with His right hand He is blessing the waters of the Jordan. Above His head is the Holy Spirit descending as a dove upon Him.

At the top of the icon, a semicircle depicts the opening of the Heavens and the voice of the Father. Angels of the Lord gathered on the shore of the Jordan River give praises to Christ. An angel of the Lord receives Christ as He comes out of the water. On the right side of the icon angels are shown with their heads bowed in reverence to Christ. They are prepared to receive Him as He comes out of the water.

The Blessing of the Waters is conducted in the church; however in many places throughout the world services are conducted near open bodies of water. As a sign of blessing as Christ blessed the Jordan, holy water is poured into the body of water. An associated tradition has been the tossing of a cross into the water to be retrieved by divers. The holy water from the church is given to the faithful to consume and to use in blessing their homes. In the weeks following the Feast, clergy visit the homes of parishioners and conduct a service of blessing using the holy water that was blessed on the Feast of Theophany to sanctify the home, the family, pets, crops, and livestock.

