

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

*Christ is in Midst!*

*He is and ever Shall be!*



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The Feast of Theophany—Our Lord's Baptism

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Today is the Feast of Theophany, when we celebrate our Lord's baptism in the river Jordan by St. John the Forerunner. At this event, Christ's baptism, God reveals that Jesus 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 delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

*(continued p.3)*

++ The Feast of Theophany ++

Sunday of the Ancestors of Christ

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 Christ's commandment, *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, 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 all. 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

Our Lord's Nativity

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 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 proceeds 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 joy: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, and Blessed is he who comes in every age, for this is not his first coming.

*(continued p.2)*

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 with us today and invite you to our social hour following the liturgy.

**Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)**

Please keep the following in your prayers: Mother Onufria, Larissa, Jack, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Abraham, George, Rochelle, Theresa, Joanne, Tamam, Loretta, Frankie, Brittany, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

**St. John Kronstadt on Theophany**

Baptism was ordained by God in the Church for the salvation of the human race, and serves for every believer as a door into the Kingdom of God. Whosoever rejected or rejects it, sweeps away his salvation, his own eternal well-being.

In this manner did the Lord speak of the Pharisees and the Scribes, who were undesirous of being baptized by John; that they were thus spurning the Counsel of God, concerning themselves, in not being baptized by him.

Beloved brothers and sisters! We all have been found worthy of holy Baptism in our infancy, through the faith of our parents and our sponsors; we were cleansed of the ancestral sin and were reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, and -- became the adopted children of the Father in Heaven.

The doors of the Kingdom of Heaven stand open to us. Let us, then, with all our hearts, always esteem the Divine gift and our calling as sons and daughters of God by grace, -- withdrawing far from all sin, and let us, in our thoughts, desires, and actions, strive for the Kingdom of Heaven, that unfading inheritance, prepared for us in the heavens.

All that the Lord spoke and did on earth, He did in accordance with the pre-eternal, most-wise, and all-good Counsel of the Trinity, which transpired before all ages, all of which was necessary for the salvation, perfection and blessedness of mankind. Thus was the Lord baptized in the River Jordan, in order to subdue our destroyer, the devil, in the waters wherein we might be abundantly washed clean of sin, and that we might be born again.

**Homily on Theophany, cont'd from p.1**

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, coming in the likeness of a dove reveals the Lord of mercy.

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Today the nature of the waters is

sanctified. Today the Son of God is baptized in the waters of the Jordan, having no need Himself of cleansing, but in order to cleanse the sinful human race from defilement.

Now the heavens open and the voice of God the Father is heard: This is My beloved Son. The Holy Spirit de-



scends upon the Savior of the world, Who stands in the Jordan, thereby confirming that this indeed is He Who is the incarnate Son of God. The Holy Trinity is clearly made manifest and is revealed to mankind.

The waters of the Jordan are sancti-

fied and all of nature is cleansed, for out of water the world was made, and moisture penetrates everywhere, giving life to everything else in nature. Without moisture neither animals nor plants can live; moisture penetrates into rocks, into every place in the world. The waters are sanctified and through them the whole world, in preparation for renewal and regeneration for God's eternal Kingdom which is to come.

Every year on this day the glory of God is revealed, renewing and confirming what was accomplished at Christ's Baptism. Again the heavens are opened; again the Holy Spirit descends. We do not see this with our bodily eyes, but we sense its power.

It is the action of the Holy Spirit. Those who with faith drink these waters and anoint themselves with them receive relief and healing from spiritual and bodily infirmities. Homes are sanctified by these waters, the power of demons is expelled, God's blessing is brought down upon all that is sprinkled with these waters.



## *Homily on the Theophany of Christ, (cont'd from p.1)*

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 vocation as those created in the divine image and likeness is fulfilled.

I know that sometimes we are tempted to forget that human beings are also part of the creation, that we also are dependent upon the light of the sun, the fruits of the earth, and the air that we breath. God created Adam from the dust of the earth; yes, our bodies are made of the same stuff as all life forms on our planet. That's a humbling reminder that God sustains our life together with that of all His other creatures, but it shouldn't surprise us.

Have you ever noticed how God uses the basic physical substances life, such as water, wine, bread, and oil to bring us into His life? Whether it's the smell of incense, the beauty of icons, or the very existence of a church building, we are surrounded by created blessings that enable us to worship the Lord. That shouldn't be surprising, for He is the source of all things, including our hearts, souls, and minds. If we forget that we are His creatures in the midst of His good creation, we won't be able to worship or serve Him at all.

Unfortunately, it's a common human temptation to forget what it means to worship God. It's easy to fool ourselves into thinking that the world revolves around us and that the limitations and problems experienced by others somehow do not—or at least, should not—apply to us. But then reality slaps us in the face: the loss of a

loved one, sickness, unemployment, a broken relationship, or even bad weather remind us quickly that we are subject to the difficulties that inevitably accompany life in our corrupt world.

At the Feast of Theophany, we are reminded, however, that these challenges do not separate us from God, for they do not remove us from His blessed creation or destroy our ability to share in His life. Jesus Christ entered fully into the world as know it. He made holy every dimension of our life, including suffering and pain, from the womb to the tomb. No part of the creation, and no dimension of our existence, can separate us from His presence, from His blessing, from His steadfast love. He has conquered even death on our behalf.

We are reminded at Theophany that life on our own terms isn't really life at all. For when we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized into His death. We die with Christ to sin and all its corruptions so that we will rise with Him in newness of life, so that we will be clothed in a garment of light and participate fully in His victory over sin and death. For the blessed life that our Lord has brought to the world is not just the continuation of what's become comfortable and familiar to us. Instead, it's a life that requires a decisive break from the corruption that has become a second nature to us.

To be baptized into Christ is to die from all that separates us from God. It is to share in the blessing that our Lord has

brought to the entire world; it is to see all of the creation as holy, as participating in the transformation and healing of the Kingdom. Every dimension of our lives must become an Theophany, a showing or manifestation, of God's salvation. We are to offer every aspect of our life, and every bit of the world with which we come in contact, to the Lord as a sacrament, as a participation in the Holy Mystery of God. For nothing is outside the scope of His love; nothing is separate from His will for a new heaven and new earth.

Today is the Feast of Theophany. It's time to prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight. For He comes to renew all creation and to bring us into the glory of His kingdom. He comes to make all reality an icon of His holiness. Let's not stand in the way; let's not refuse His blessing, but instead live as those who, having died to sin, truly wear a garment of light.



## The Icon of the Theophany (an explanation)

Theophany, sometimes called Epiphany, is upon us. January 6 is the official date that the baptism of Christ. It is not to be confused with the Western holiday also called Epiphany which is a celebration of the magi presenting the baby Christ with their gifts.

The word Theophany means “Revelation of God;” Theophany therefore marks the revelation of the Trinitarian nature of God when Jesus was baptized. Those who witnessed heard the Father’s voice from Heaven, saw the Spirit descending upon Jesus, and could see Jesus in the flesh, whom God confirmed to be His Son with His voice.

The symbolism of this icon is deep and rich. There is one particular part I want to focus on for this blog entry. *Jesus is naked, or nearly so.* Christ is purposely depicted with little or no clothing. But why is that significant?

All throughout the creation narrative in Genesis we see God creating and then saying it is “good.” Man and woman were created together in God’s image. They were both beautiful, and while they lacked physical garments, they were clothed in the glory of the “image” and “likeness” of God. However, when they fell into sin, they hid in shame until God brought them garments of skin to wear (which symbolizes the sinful tendency that now obscures our true nature). Their natural beauty was transformed into an object of shame. Adam and Eve fell, and with them fell creation.

Now, enter Jesus Christ: he represents the second Adam (1 Cor 15). In shame and nakedness, Adam hid. Yet Christ comes in his majesty, both as God and man, both in glory and nakedness completely unshamed, representing the beauty of the undefiled human made possible through Him (and in the subsequent centuries, Christians were often baptized without any clothing, shedding the garments of the “old man” to die in Christ and be resurrected in Him). But why was Christ baptized if He had no sin?

While Christ was baptized in the Jordan River, it was really the Jordan and all of creation that was baptized in Christ. As Canticle Four of Compline of Theophany states, *At Thine appearing in the body, the earth was sanctified, the waters blessed, the heaven enlightened, and mankind was set loose from the bitter tyranny of the*

*enemy.*

We see the beginning of a new creation in Theophany. Things are being set right. Christ has come not only to cleanse and restore mankind, but to adopt us as heirs into his Kingdom. And when we receive His glory, not only are we redeemed, but we draw all of creation with us into the final restoration. That is why “creation groans” in eager expectation, awaiting the glorification of the children of God. (Rom. 8)

Here are a few other aspects to consider. 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 supra-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. If this were an Olympic race, it would be as if the Old Testament (John the Baptist and all before him) were passing the baton to the New Testament (Jesus Christ and all of the saints).

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 – You established the sea by Your might, You broke the heads of the dragons in the water.*

