

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

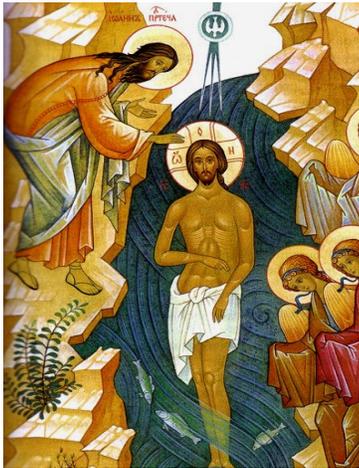
*Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!*



Volume 11 Issue 496

Sunday after Theophany—The Baptism of Christ

January 9, 2022



At this Great Feast of Theophany, we bring into the present Christ's holy Baptism into the waters of the Jordan. At first glance, the Feast of the Holy Theophany may appear to be solely the remembrance of Christ's baptism. Some teach that we celebrate Christ's baptism solely that we may be obedient and "follow Christ's exam-

ple." But such a simplified understanding of baptism belies a far greater and more beautiful divine truth and mystery revealed by God through His Church—a truth and a mystery so important for our salvation.

For our Orthodox Church, Theophany is celebrated on par with the other Great Feasts. Christ's baptism is of so much significance to us because God is revealed to us in this Feast—hence the name, "Theophany", a *manifestation or appearing of God*. God reveals Himself to us as Holy Trinity here. The Father speaks, declaring before the world, "You are My Beloved Son in Whom I am well-pleased" even as the Holy Spirit descends upon Christ in the likeness of a dove, setting Christ on equal par with the Father and the Spirit.

In the Jordan River, mystically pre-  
*(continued p. 3)*

+ Sunday after Theophany +  
+Martyr Polyuektos of Armenia+

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.*

## **Christ as Beggar by Dr. Haralambis Bousias**

Christ, our Redeemer, eternal love, is our merciful God, but also a tenacious beggar. He knocks at the door of our heart and entreats us to give him something. What does he ask for? He beseeches us: 'Son, give me your heart' (Wis. 18, 26). Alas, we don't hear him and, naturally, don't give him anything: not our heart that he asks for; not even a moment of our life span, a moment of repentance. One moment is more than enough for us to cry out to him as did the grateful robber:

'Remember me, Lord when you come in your kingdom' (Luke 23, 42).

Our God's a beggar. He has provided us lavishly with his good things, the greatest of these being our life span, the time to seek repentance so that he can cosset us in the warmth of his embrace and grant us the gift of eternity, the Kingdom of Heaven.

God became a beggar to make us into gentlefolk, the rich, nobles and saints, to show us our only destination, our transition from being 'in

the image', to becoming 'in the likeness', that is glorification. He's a beggar, not to benefit himself but for the good of us. This is sublime love.

He created the universe, the sun, the moon, our earth, the stars, the whole of the firmament which works like a well-oiled machine, with each of its components having a particular purpose from which it never deviates for a single moment; and yet he became a beggar.

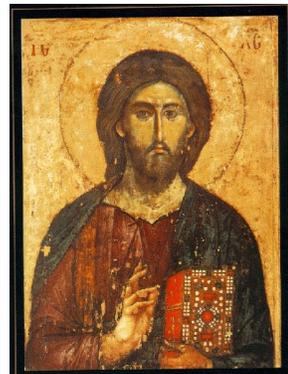
And, although all things in the firmament have  
*(continued on p.2)*

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.





*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

**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: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Louise, George, Evan, Ryan, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Doug, Heidi, Laura, Elizabeth, Matthew, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Pat, Bill, Carol, Pam, Gladys, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

**Taking Stock in the New Year**

At the turn of the year, it's customary to take stock. We look back at what's happened, the pleasant and the difficult, the beautiful and the ugly, in an effort to consign to oblivion whatever hurt us, and to hold dearly in our heart what has brought us ease and joy. The reckoning has to do with the events of the calendar year which

has passed, in politics, in sport and the special moments of our life. The question is, how do we evaluate, in the end, what's important to us and what isn't. Are there events we can relive or is everything unique?

For the Church, the year is time, that is, an opportunity, on the one hand, to serve the Lord, to live in accordance with Christ's commandments, to attend the liturgy, to make our way in praise, thanks and love towards God who became human for our sake. And on the other hand, to serve others, to care about each of our neighbors, to become the neighbor of every person, insofar as we can. For this reason, in our church life, in the parish we go to, we should bear this reckoning in mind, so as to remember in the first place how many of our fellow-parishioners we've got to know, how many we pray for, how many we feel more familiar with. And also whether we've opened our heart to our surroundings, if we've managed to listen, to empathize, to reduce tensions, to overcome ourselves.

**Christ as Beggar, con't from p.1**

their purpose, the most precious, the crown of creation, we, the human race, have abandoned our purpose, the desire of the beggar who created us, who urges: 'Become holy, as I am holy' (1 Peter, 1, 16).

Christ is a generous benefactor and gives each of us the gift of life. He want us to use every year he gives us, to make it a time of repentance. Every year contains 365 days, which means 8,760 hours and therefore 525,300 minutes. Of these thousands of minutes he himself has given us with love, he begs just one back. And we don't give it to him; or at best we do so with a stingy and churlish attitude. We're ungrateful and unappreciative of the blessing of time which he's given us. This is because we've forgotten our purpose: the quest for deification.

In the year of time granted to us, we don't labor spiritually, we don't expend our energies on works of love, on soul-nourishing prayer which elevates us to heaven, on works of peace, on support for the sick, on pro-

vision for the poor, on a spiritual outpouring for the needs of those in trouble. We waste our time. We spend it on fleeting pleasures and good times, following the rationale of 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die' (Is. 22, 13).

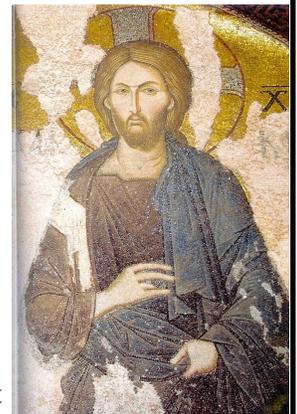
We pay a great deal of attention to many issues in our life, but these are matters of lesser significance than using our time to pursue the goal of our existence. We pay careful attention when it comes to not missing out on our transport, the bus, train, ship or plane that will take us to one of our transitory destinations. We pay attention when a short delay can make the difference between life and death for someone who's ill. We pay attention when a small fire can develop into a blaze capable of destroying vast swathes of land. We pay attention when a few minutes delay in providing reinforcements in battle can lead to a rout.

If the minutes of our life are so important in our everyday affairs, how much more so are they when it comes

to fulfilling our true purpose, concerning which, unfortunately, we display indifference. Seeing this, Christ comes to us as a beggar and entreats us to give him one moment of repentance. And this is a moment which isn't even ours. It belongs to him in any case, yet we still won't give it to him. We don't say: 'Yours from your own'.

Our time is invaluable. If we waste it, we shall answer to Christ, who stands at the door of our heart and begs us to

give him a minute. A minute of repentance, a minute of salvation in which we can be healed spiritually and bodily, so that we don't burn in the outer fire, so that we don't miss the train to our desired destination, the kingdom of heaven.



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

sent for us in the blessing of the waters we partake of this day, God reveals Himself to us as three in one, undivided yet distinct in Persons. Here, God shows Himself to be a relationship of love and perfect unity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is here who begets the Word by Whom He speaks all things into being and proclaims them “good,” He who made the heavens and the earth and the waters in which He’s baptized. Here, the Father declares this truth to the whole world, revealing Jesus as His beloved Son. The Spirit is also here present, filling all things, and descending as a dove, ever proceeding from the Father.

Christ is not a messenger, not just a good teacher or example. If He is not also God, there is no renewal of our human nature, no “new Adam,” no salvation from sin and death. Who else can defeat sin and death and renew the race of man save Him who first created us, the very Word of God? As St. Athanasius writes in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, “It was in the power of none other to turn the corruptible to incorruption, except the Savior Himself, that had at the beginning also made all things out of nought: and that none other could create anew the likeness of God’s image for men, save the Image of the Father” (On the Incarnation, 20)

Second, Christ God pours out His redemption, His love, His calling on our lives through this Feast, inviting us to be made anew in His image and likeness, the image of the Father. By entering into the waters of Jordan, it becomes the means through which we enter into the spiritual race of the new Adam, that Christ inaugurated by His Incarnation. St. Paul assures us, “as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27), that is, have died to the old man and been raised to the new spiritual man in Christ: This is the water that Christ refers to when He says to Nicodemus in John 3:5, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

Fittingly, the Jordan where Christ God is baptized is

also the river that for Israel was the means of a *temporal* rescue: Here Jacob crossed over to flee from Esau. Joshua commanded the priests carrying the Holy Ark to cross the Jordan so the Israelites could enter the Promised Land—and the Jordan parted for them as the Red Sea had for Moses when Israel fled Egypt. Here Elijah took his mantle, struck the water, dividing it, he and Elisha crossed as on dry land.

Now, Christ by His baptism, *sanctifies* this water. He makes it the means of *eternal* rescue and salvation for those who put on Christ and live out their baptism through repentance throughout their lives. Indeed, Crea-

tion itself is renewed here: All creation is sanctified by means of Christ’s Baptism, beginning with that most basic element of His creation—*water*. It was the mystical waters that were separated to form the heavens and the earth. So, with the sanctification of water, all creation is renewed: The Creator, God the Word, has entered into it and it becomes what it first was and returns to its first beauty. It takes on a ‘spiritual’ attribute through its blessing and becomes the means through which God communicates His grace.

By being born anew by “water and the Spirit,” Baptism and Chrismation, through this water made present at each baptism, we have the potential to become what God, in His great love

for us, first created us to be—truly alive, deified beings capable of growing in holiness and communion with the one God in Trinity.

We modern people are preoccupied by so many things, so many cares that we think are so, so important. But here is the one thing needful—that we put on Christ in Baptism and then *live out* that baptism, growing in relationship and communion with the living God, glorifying Him with our lives. This is the Gospel, the Good News of Christ’s baptism in the Jordan. This is the most important truth for us to apply as we begin 2022 and receive again this water of our salvation.

To God be the Glory. Amen.



**Give us this day our daily bread**

According to Saint Chrysostom, as far ~ as our life and our morals are concerned, the Lord orders us to ask for angelic conduct and to fulfil whatever the angels fulfil. However, since we are made of flesh, He has taught us to ask for our bodily needs, as well. This should be done by spiritual means. We should not ask for luxury and delight, but "our essential bread", the basic and necessary things. This is to be done 'today', without anxiety, "That our daily care does not exhaust us even more."

According to the holy Fathers, with this petition we ask not only for material bread, but mostly the spiritual Bread, Chrs̄s̄t is offered to us with His word, and with His Body and His Blood.

This offering takes place in every Divine Liturgy. In the first part of the divine Liturgy, the instructive, the word of God is offered through verses taken from the Old Testament in the Antiphons and is followed by the reading of the Epistle and the Gospel. On Mount Athos the Beatitudes are chanted as well.

In the second part of the Divine Liturgy, we partake in the sacrifice of Christ and we receive His crucified and resurrected Body. That is why we recite the Lord's prayer before Holy Communion and after the recitation of, "And render us, O Master, worthy that we may boldly without condemnation dare to call upon You the heavenly God as Father, and to say...". In this way this prayer is closely connected to the Holy Eucharist and leads us to a eucharistic use of this world. By asking God for everything we need, we acknowledge Him as the only provider of everything good, and we acknowledge all the gifts of life as His gifts.

This helps us to be humble, grateful and thankful towards God, "Let us give thanks unto the Lord", "It is meet and right", "For all these things we give thanks to You... for the seen and the unseen benefits... for all the things we know and do not know". Furthermore, this helps us to offer to God His gifts in return, "Your Gifts, of what is Yours, do we offer to You, in all we do and for all Your blessings for ever". Now we can behave accordingly towards God's gifts, towards people and towards things. Since they are God's gifts, we must not scorn them. In this way, we can make the correct eucharistic use of the world, avoiding the spiritually destructive abuse or excess. If we

had adopted the eucharistic way of life, we would respect the creation that surrounds us and we would not have ended with today's terrible ecological disaster.

Let us pay attention to the following: The temporary consuming way of life is totally opposed to the spirit of this petition. It is not eucharistic but un-eucharistic. It is not brotherly but selfish and individualistic. It does not delight in austerity, the essential bread, but it pursues unreasonable extravagance and luxury. Nevertheless, we all know that our over-consuming society ultimately turns out to be our grave and leads us to many injustices and social evils. It is also noteworthy that we ask for the essential bread not only for ourselves, but as in the previous petitions, for all of us.

One can not forget his brethren when he asks God for material and spiritual goods. Orthodox sociology, charity and brotherhood are based on the 'our' and the 'us' of this petition. This petition reminds us of the multiplication of the five loaves of bread and the two fish by the Lord in the desert, in order to satisfy the multitude's hunger. also reminds us of the common ownership of goods by the first Christians of Jerusalem and of the monastic communities of our times. Even the Orthodox missionary work is based on this principle. Is it possible not to care for and not to be interested in the forwarding of the heavenly Bread to those who starve spiritually?

**And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

As long as man lives self-centered life, he can not forgive his fellow men. His offended ego does not allow him to. However, when man repents and decides to place God in the centre of his life, then he forgives those who distressed, harmed and were unjust to him. We must put up a hard struggle in order to liberate ourselves from resentment, because egoism tyrannizes our soul. For this reason, the Lord taught us to seek forgiveness from God, on the condition that we forgive those who trespass against us. According to Saint Chrysostom, the Lord could forgive us without demanding beforehand that we in turn forgive our fellow men, "However, in this way, He shows His charity, even more ..., but he wants you to benefit from this, giving you very many opportunities of kindness and charity, opportunities to put out the beastly behavior from you, quench anger and unite you to your member."

(continued next issue)

