

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 9 Issue 394

30th Sunday after Pentecost–Sunday after Theophany

January 12, 2020



We may experience a let-down after the holiday season. Though it has its own stresses, a time of year filled with parties, rich food, and visiting with loved ones appeals to most people, if only as a cultural observance. The same is surely true for those of us who celebrated the Savior's birth at Christmas and His baptism at Theophany. We enjoyed the beautiful ser-

vices with their joyful hymns and familiar readings, as well as the blessing of the holy water. As the season of Theophany concludes today, we may have a sense of loss that this special time of year is coming to a close. That is understandable, but we will have missed the point entirely of this great feast if we think that we should now simply forget about it and get back to life as usual.

Today's gospel reading tells us what the Lord did after His baptism, at which it was revealed that He is the Son of God and a member of the Holy Trinity. He went to "Galilee of the Gentiles," an area where Jews lived in a culture with such strong Gentile influence that it was called a place of darkness. The Lord went there in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that "the people who sat in darkness have seen a" (continued p. 3)

**** 30th Sunday after Pentecost ****

***** Martyr Tatiana of Rome *****

Epistle: Ephesians 4: 7-13

Gospel: Matthew 4: 12-17

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.*

The Angel of the Desert, by Georgios Manolis

The life and activity of John the Baptist and Forerunner is an enduring testimony in Christ, culminating in his martyrdom for Him. Just as then, when he was active in the wilderness of the Jordan, so today his voice can be heard in the wilderness of our society, since although we now have everything and live with other people all around us, we're still far removed from God and our neighbors.

John was the first light announcing the coming

of the day of the Lord and preceding the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord"'.

In the desert, this charismatic man, who proved to be 'the greatest among those born of women', preached in advance the message of Christ's Gospel in only a few words: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'. Entry into this kingdom, therefore, depended on the advent of the messiah

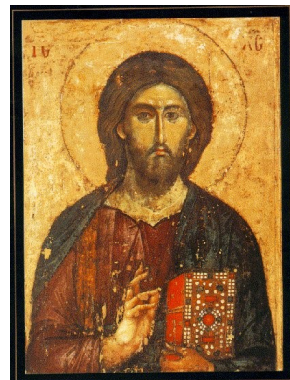
Himself, as the agent and founder of this kingdom within history. The coming of Christ and His kingdom into the world, however, also required repentance and our return to the true faith. In this way, then, the Forerunner became the preacher of repentance and a witness to the coming of Christ.

The honorable Forerunner prepared the coming of the Lord and gave a brief account of the dimensions of His redeem- (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.





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

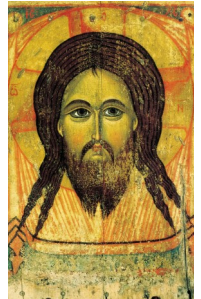
St. Theophan the Recluse says, "The crux of the matter is that we must rain our minds to live within our heart. Our mind must be transferred from our intellect into our feeling heart, the two must be made one." In other words, our thinking mind must become our loving mind. This is the depth and warmth which the Church Fathers invite us to reach. Yes, in our very

poor efforts to pray, our minds are immediately and firmly rooted in our own personal conceit and pride.

St. Macarios the Great, a 5th century Desert Father use to say that our minds must be nailed to the cross of Christ.

The Church Fathers have a great deal to say about how to save ourselves from sin, or in other words, how to come closer to Go. The way to God leads, through our attitude to other people, to our neighbors, and it is along this way too that spiritual death comes to us.

We can be angry at people, we can be proud in our relationships with them, or we can emanate sensuousness. Each one of these evil attitudes can bring us to our own spiritual death. We can also love a person, experience humility in our relationships and see someone with pure eyes. When this takes place, we discover that every human is made in the image of Christ. *(Light in the Darkness, Serge Fudel, p. 66)*



The Angel in the Wilderness, (cont'd from p. 1)

ing work. This precursory task of John's was sanctified and confirmed by the Triune God at the Lord's baptism. John's testimony is the same voice as that of the Church, calling us to recognize the Messiah in the person of Christ in the dry and arid wilderness of the present world.

There's no lack of criticism of the secular power of Herod Antipas in John's preaching: Herod's immorality, his abandonment of faith in God, as well as the exploitation and depredations against the people through the abuse of his power, all to their detriment. John also didn't hesitate to castigate the Pharisees and Sadducees, accusing them of misusing their prerogatives and of religious hypocrisy.

When speaking of the Forerunner, mention must also be made of the ascetic nature of his life in the desert which indicates and also proves to people today that we can live well on little, in contrast to the consumerist and material life-style engaged in by so many, even during the crisis we're experiencing today. This is a crisis

which has led to the glorification of matter and the ego, since we now believe that we can do everything and have everything while keeping our distance from God and other people and looking after only ourselves. This is a crisis which has led to a sense of



our independence from others and God, and is a crisis that, in reality, is due to corruption, as is implied by its economic dimension, and also to the immorality of modern society.

Through his preaching, John called people to repentance, to awareness and confession of their guilt and sins.

The enduring legacy of the Forerunner is his call, through his preaching, to repentance; that is, a change of mind and way of life, from the immoral to the moral, from hatred to love, from envy to joy and hence a return to our communion with God and other people. This is a testimony within our history to the true God and real life, a life of love in Christ, that is with Him and for Him, which depends on our relationship with our neighbor, who might be our brother or sister, but could equally be our enemy.

Moreover, our Lord's saying 'Love your enemy as you do yourself' means that we should see the world and our neighbor as an extension of our self. It follows that we should be anxious that everyone be saved, brought to God, healed of their passions and weaknesses, restored, filled with peace and joy, because the whole world is our self and our self the whole world.

So the life and activity of the
(continued p.4, column 2)

great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned." Christ went there to begin preaching openly as He said "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

The miraculous events that occurred at the Lord's baptism were not ends in themselves, as though all had been completed when the voice of the Father declared "This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased" and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove. The truth about Him had been revealed, and the Savior blessed the waters and restored the entire creation when He lowered Himself into the Jordan for baptism by John.

Even with their cosmic significance, these extraordinary events were preparatory for the Lord's public ministry. They showed that He is the Light Who shines on those who live in darkness, who remain captive to the fear of death and blind to His divine glory. In order for people to benefit from the revelation that He is truly the Son of God, they had to respond to His call for repentance. Christ proclaimed the good news in order for them to be able to respond to Him with obedient faith.

St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians that the One Who ascended into heaven is the One of Who first "descended into the lower parts of the earth." The same Lord Who lowered Himself to Hades after His death then rose up in glory and ascended into heaven. At His baptism, He also descended into the dark waters of the Jordan, into the physical creation itself which had been "subjected to futility" because of human sin. (Rom. 8:20) The wages of sin is death, and the Savior took upon Himself the full consequences of our estrangement from God in order to conquer them and bring us into the holy joy for which He created us in the first place.

After the Savior's resurrection and ascension, the Holy Spirit, Who descended upon the Lord in the form of a dove at His baptism, fell upon His disciples as flames of fire upon their heads, enabling them to heal the sick, to raise the dead, and to minister boldly and prophetically in His Name. Christ's followers became the Church, His

Body, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The point of this great blessing was not for them to rest content with their personal religious experience, but to strengthen all the members of the Body in their ministries "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The Lord provided them with spiritual gifts in order to strengthen the Church in faithfulness as they drew the world to salvation, not for their own glorification.

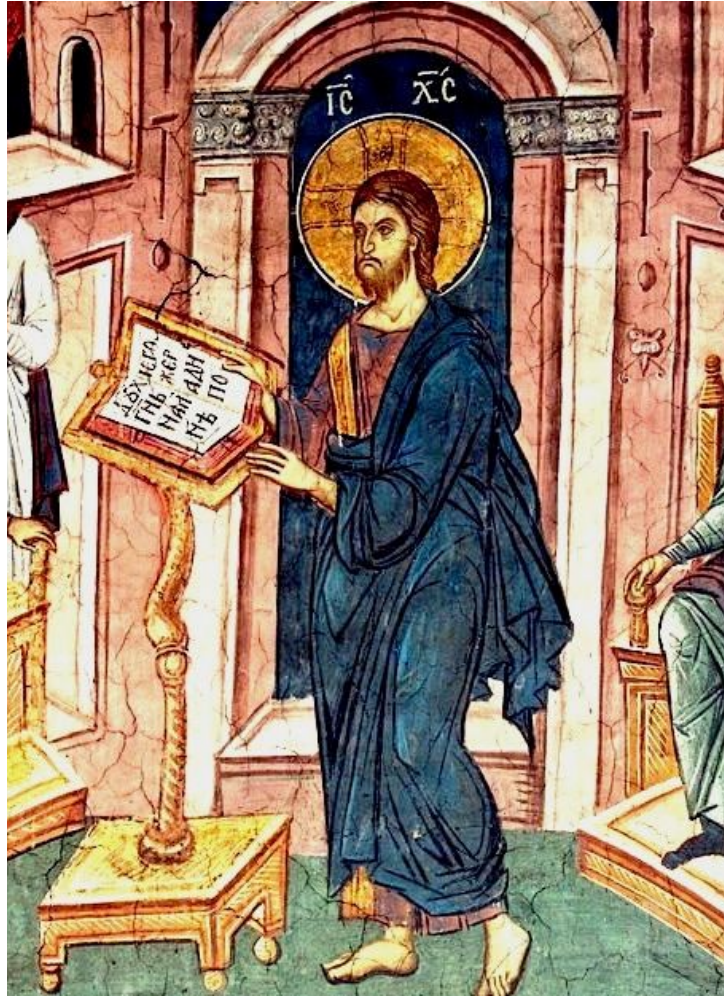
As we conclude the season of Theophany today, our focus should not be on regretting that we are back at work or school or that the beautiful trappings of the holiday season have come down. It should also not be on how we have fulfilled a religious duty by focusing on the spiritual truth manifested at Christ's baptism: that He is truly the Son of God and member of the Holy Trinity. Instead, our focus must be on becoming ever more brilliant epiphanies of the Light of Christ in our darkened world.

We do not do that as isolated individuals or on the basis simply of our emotions, our opinions, or even our morality. No, we do that when we live our lives faithfully as members of Christ's Body, the Church. We must use our gifts "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." There is no other

genuinely Christian way of life.

We must not forget that the Christian life is a life in community, a shared existence, and an experience of communion with God and one another. When we celebrate the revelation of the Holy Trinity, we proclaim that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons Who share a common divine nature. "Father" and "Son" are relational terms, and it is through the Holy Spirit that we are brought by grace into intimate communion with the Lord. As St. Paul taught the Galatians, the Father has adopted us through the Son, making us sons and heirs through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. (Gal. 4:4-7) Our calling is nothing less than to become "partakers of the divine nature" by grace. (2 Pet. 1:4)

(continued on p. 4)



Homily on Christ's mission, cont'd from p.3)

After His baptism, Christ called the people to repent and get ready for the coming of God's Kingdom. We must repent of thinking that we can serve Him faithfully apart from using our gifts, whatever they may be, for the edification of His Body, the Church. God has given us different strengths and abilities, and we must offer ourselves to Him and to one another to build up His Body if we are to have any hope of attaining "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Our calling is nothing less than to become an epiphany of the communion of divine love shared by the members of the Holy Trinity. We have certainly not ascended into heaven, but we have died to sin in being baptized into the death of the One Who is now seated at the right hand of the Father. We have put Him on like a garment, being clothed in the robe of light.

We are Christ's Bride, the Church, and He is the Bridegroom. In receiving Communion, we become one flesh with Him through union with His Body and Blood. We are also one flesh with one another, with all who commune with Him, for we are members of the same Body.

So after celebrating Theophany, we simply cannot go back to life as usual. In order to respond faithfully to the revelation of the Holy Trinity, our common life must shine with the light of God's salvation in our darkened world. There is no other genuinely Christian form of witness, no other way to attain to "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" than to love and serve our Lord in one another. That is how the worship of the Trinity will be made manifest in the life of our parish, as we build up the Body of Christ. That is how we will obey the Lord's command: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

To God be the Glory. Amen.

The Angel in the Desert, cont'd from p.2

Forerunner is a testimony to and constant reminder of the kind of life we're called upon to live as children of God. In the wilderness of our life, we'll be asked to encounter some Herod, some Herodias, some Salome.

In other words, we'll have to face the vanity of this world, the passions, the sins, the machinations of the devil, which look to the eye to be sweet fruits but which are bitter to the tongue and have painful consequences for us.

We're not undefended or alone in the face of all this, however: we have Christ as our guide, Who also acts as our healer and Savior. Those who live for Christ and for others are armed with the grace of God and fight the sin and wickedness of this world. Because they're truly alive, their love extends even to death, to martyrdom for His sake, and to the defense of their neighbor, when witness becomes martyrdom.

This was so in the case of the Forerunner, who didn't hesitate, didn't compromise. Through his personal witness he calls Christians to a continuous witness and martyrdom. A martyrdom of blood and of the conscience. The life of Christians is a constant struggle towards perfection in Christ, fighting against our everyday problems and the difficulties of

life, the temptations, passions and sin.

The Church urges us to heed the 'voice of one crying in the wilderness' and to 'prepare the way of the Lord', so that the desert may bloom, that the wilderness in which we live in modern society may flourish. And to realize that all of us can experience the kingdom of God in this world and then inherit it after the Lord's Second Coming, as a gift in return for our life in Christ and our struggle to grow into the likeness of God.

