

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 10 Issue 445

30th Sunday after Pentecost-Sunday before Theophany

Sunday, January 3, 2021



Today is the Sunday before the Feast of Theophany or Epiphany, when we will celebrate Christ's baptism in the river Jordan and the revelation that He is truly the Son of God. His divinity is manifest, is shown openly, when—at His baptism-- the voice of the Father declares "You are my beloved Son" and the Holy Spirit descends upon

Him in the form of a dove. Epiphany shows us that Jesus Christ is not merely a great religious teacher or moral example. He is truly God—a member of the Holy Trinity-- and His salvation permeates His entire creation, including the water of the river Jordan. Through His and our baptism, we become participants in the holy mystery of salvation.

Think for a moment how stunning these statements about Jesus Christ as God would be to those who knew Him before He began His public ministry. St. Luke records that the Theotokos and St. Joseph were shocked to find the 12-year-old Savior discussing the Law in the Temple in Jerusalem with the elders. The witness of the angelic choirs, the visit of the wise men, and all the wonder of the events surrounding His birth were apparently

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*** Sunday before Theophany ***

** Holy Prophet Malachi **

Epistle: Timothy 4:5-8

Gospel: Mark 1: 1-8

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 Message of the Angels by Metropolitan Sotirios

The message of the Angels from heaven to humanity is of particular importance today concerning all the peoples on earth, who are suffering from confusion, anxiety, insecurity, deadly conflicts, exploitation and the sad consequences of the epidemic. And the question is: where do we end up with this situation?

Along with all the other everyday problems in human societies, there are psychological ones that have been added,

such as depression, despair, the tendency to commit suicide and despondency.

The prophetic word always warns: "those who are far from You shall perish" (Psalm 72, 27), either as individuals or as nations. These divinely inspired words have been verified countless times in the history of humankind. Therefore, only by returning to God can the world be saved. In particular, we Orthodox are called upon to bear good witness of our faith, so

that others may find their way to the Savior Jesus.

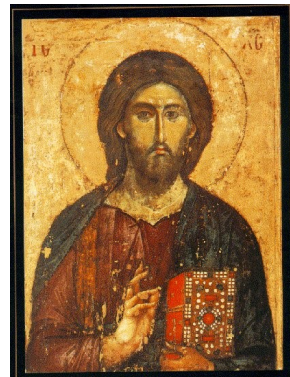
When Christ was born, humble people rushed to worship Him; not only the simple shepherds but also the wise Magi from the East, who did not hesitate to bend their knees and pay their respects before the holy Infant. The religious leaders knew from the books of the Prophets that the Messiah would come in Bethlehem of Judea, as evidenced by the information they

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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 worshiping with us today. Because of COVID-19, our social hour has been canceled until we receive further instructions from the Department of Health.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Evan, Ryan, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Paula, Laura, Elizabeth Matthew, Corella, Ron, Renee, Daniel, Frankie, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Thoughts on the Faith

The Kingdom of God is within us. We don't have to fly to some faraway land to find a connection with God. We do not need to put on a show and flaunt our faith before cameras or on stages. Our relationship with the Divine is simple. We need to return home, to ourselves, to enter into

our hearts, remaining alone there with God (cf. Mt. 6:6). We pray and build a relationship with God differently. It is more hidden from the external gaze; it is internal, intimate. It's very important to have a sober understanding of this, otherwise you could take your own feelings and emotions for a Divine state of grace.

We learn to be silent before God; we learn to control our thoughts and feelings; we learn to keep the words we read or hear in church from flying away, but to keep them within, in our hearts.

Sometimes someone may not be saying anything out loud, but within him there is prayer; that is, he lives the presence of God within himself, his soul is in a peaceful, tender state, and he sees God in everyone and everything. This is a gift of God, not human efforts and experiences.

What must we do in such a state? Be quiet. Be alone with God; feel the presence of God within you. This is a Divine spark that will then warm us for more than a month, and perhaps even more than a whole year. This is the union of man with God that leads to the Kingdom of God.

The Message of the Angels, cont'd from p. 1)

gave to Herod. Yet, they did not rush to visit Jesus, even though Bethlehem is only eight kilometers from Jerusalem. And when the rulers of Jerusalem later dealt with Jesus, their sole purpose was to exterminate Him.

We all know how simple and humble the Lord was, from His birth to His sacrifice on the Cross. Therefore, only humble and simple souls can approach, get to know and become united with the humble Jesus and find rest, peace and true joy close to Him. Through our own example and our prayer, my brethren, let us help others to approach the Savior Christ, so that their souls may become enlightened and receive Him, so that they may enjoy the true joy and peace that He offers.

At the same time, my brothers and sisters, especially during these holy days, let us take care of our brothers who are sick, suffering from various causes. Let us do our best for them, motivating other well-meaning fellow human beings to support them to the best of their ability.

In addition, let us also pray for the whole world, which is tormented by the incurable pandemic of COVID-19. Let us ask our Redeemer for all



the peoples of the earth, for the sick, the bedridden, the homeless, the captives, the prisoners, the hungry, for those in war zones, the refugees. And let us also pray for all those who live in the darkness of ignorance of the true God and they are in despair.

My dear brothers and sisters, just as we sing in the hymns of the this great

feast, the Nativity of the Savior is a historical event, yet we experience it as present, as if it is happening now. That is why the word "today" is often repeated. During the liturgical time, when the holy sacraments of the Church are performed, all the events of the divine Economy, the redemptive presence of the Son of God on earth, are repeated here and now mystically, so that we the faithful may become participants of the salvation they offer to us.

That is why in the Christmas Divine Liturgy we can sing today along with the Angels the hymn "glory to God in the highest". We can see, together with the shepherds, the divine "Infant lying in the manger". And along with the Magi of the East we can worship the King of our souls, by offering to Him our own gifts: gold, our warm and loving hearts like mangers, so that He may come and dwell in us; myrrh, our sincere repentance for our sins; incense, to offer our wholehearted worship and gratitude for His Incarnation and the salvation He offers.

(Homily on the Sunday before Theophany, cont'd from p.1)

Forgotten or unknown by the disciples and the religious and political leaders of the day. The gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke record these events, but do not tell us that they figured prominently during His earthly ministry.

Moreover, no one expected a Messiah who was both God and man. The word “messiah” means “anointed one,” and most Jews were looking for a leader who would deliver them from Roman oppression and lead Israel to political power and independence. Christ’s own disciples thought of Him in those terms until after His resurrection. Even those closest to the Lord had great difficulty accepting that He was not an earthly king, the kind of Messiah they had grown up expecting. How difficult it was for anyone to accept that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God, the incarnate second Person of the Holy Trinity, the divine Word Who spoke the universe into existence.

Perhaps that is part of the reason that God sent a prophet to prepare the way, to begin opening the hearts and minds of the people for a coming Messiah Who did not fit their preconceived notions. Of course, few people would be comfortable around St. John the Baptist and Forerunner. He was a strict ascetic, living in the desert, eating bugs and honey, and wearing camel skin.

Like many of the Old Testament prophets before Him, St. John was outrageously bold. In addition to his shocking appearance and lifestyle, his message was severe to the point of being insulting. He proclaimed God’s truth and did not care who might be offended. Instead of gently welcoming the Pharisees and Sadducees into his movement, St. John mocked them as a brood of vipers—a bunch of venomous snakes. He told the rich to share with the poor, soldiers to stop abusing their authority, and tax collectors to stop stealing from the people. He went beyond offending those powerful groups by criticizing the immorality of the royal family and lost his head as a result.

God began to shake up Israel with St. John the Baptist,

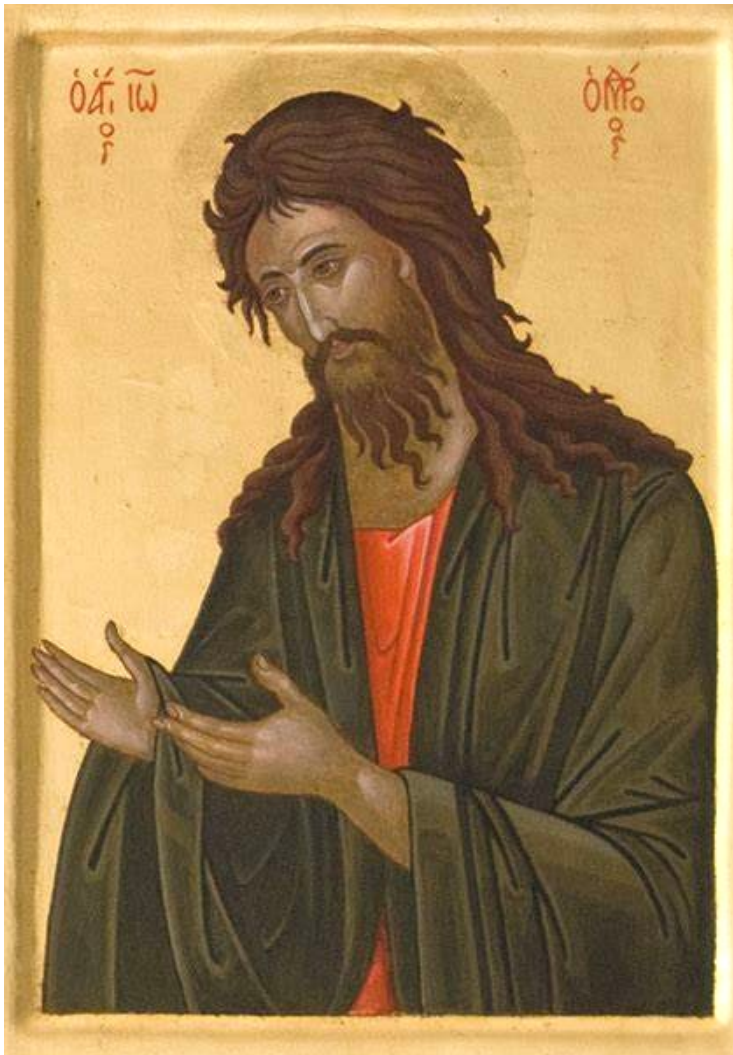
the Forerunner of our Lord. He began to open their eyes to a Messiah Whom they did not expect. Gentle words from a respectable rabbi would not cut it; everyone had seen and heard that before. They needed a call to repentance from a wild and holy man who was absolutely fearless in calling the people to repent, to change the direction they were going in relation to God and neighbor. They were to make straight whatever crookedness there was in their lives. They were to stop violating God’s requirements for how to live. No one was to say, “But I am a child of Abraham or a religious leader or a well-respected person, so repentance is not for me.” He

called everyone to greater holiness, to serving God more faithfully than they had done before.

As we prepare for the Feast of Theophany, St. John’s message should ring loudly in our ears today, right here and now. For even more than the Jews of old, we must bring our lives in line with God’s salvation in Jesus Christ because we have already received the fulfillment of the promise, the fullness of the blessing. Having celebrated His birth as Orthodox Christians, we already know that our Savior is the Son of God. The Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts and we are members of the Christ’s own Body, the Church. Nonetheless, everyone single one of us has much room to grow in living according to the great truth that we have received, for our lives have not yet become perfect epiphanies of what Christ’s salvation means for human beings.

It would be different if the Epiphany of Jesus Christ as the Son of God were merely an idea or concept to be grasped as an abstract truth, like a mathematical equation. Perhaps then we could be satisfied with giving the correct doctrinal answer. The spiritual life is not like that, however, because this feast calls us to be in right relationship with the One who unites humanity and divinity in Himself. In order for our Lord’s epiphany is to occur in us, every dimension of who we are as we live and breathe in this world must be transformed by His divine glory.

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Homily-Sunday before Theophany (cont'd p.3)

His life must become ours. Like an iron left in the fire, we are to participate in Him fully, sharing in a communion ultimately beyond words and radiating the glory of His divine salvation.

The hard truth is that repentance is essential for opening ourselves to the life of Christ. No, this calling is not to a self-righteous legalism that allegedly earns salvation or somehow impresses God. We must do our part, however, cooperating with the great mercy of Christ, actively receiving and responding to Him in ways that make straight what is crooked in our lives. He would call us to become true icons of our Lord, to participate as fully as we can in the divine healing and transformation of Jesus Christ. Those who have died to sin and been raised to new life in Him, those who have put on Christ in baptism, must live in a manner that manifests the holy union of God and humanity that our Savior embodies.

So let us prepare for the great feast of Christ's baptism by straightening the crooked areas of our lives. Instead of finding ways to ignore the Forerunner, let us take his sobering message to heart. For the Messiah is born and on His way to the Jordan where His divinity will be made clear. But will we have the eyes to see His glory? Will we be ready for Him? There is only one way to prepare and that is to repent, to turn away from everything that hinders our full participation in the divine glory that He brings to all who bear His image and likeness and to the entire creation. That is what His baptism makes possible for us, but we must prepare by repentance in order to share personally in this great mystery of our salvation.

* * *

Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem to be counted in a census and were unable to find an inn in which to stay. Really, who has time and space for God today? How necessary is God for us in our life. Back then, people had filled all the inns and there was no lodging for the divine Infant. I think this demonstrates that people fill their lives with natural and human things and leave no margin for the supernatural, the divine. This continues to be so today: humanity is so locked into its own restrictions that it's unwilling to accept God. Of course, the amazing thing is that, in any case, the divine Infant finds a way to come to earth and reveal Himself to ordinary people.

Thoughts on Christ's Nativity by Theoni Boura

The magi, well-educated scholars of their day, travelled for some time and, in the end, arrived and were able to venerate the divine Infant. We should note that the magi had studied the Scriptures and knew that the star would mark an important birth. This demonstrates a) that those who are interested and search will see God's sign and will recognize Him; b) that their lengthy journey denotes the long process of the quest for God, Who is there all the time, if we only can be bothered to go and meet Him; c) that human wisdom reverences God and there have been important scholars who were not only believers, but also saints of the Church; d) that God accepted human gifts, which His All-Holy Mother kept and gave to the Church of Jerusalem. They're now kept in the Monastery of Saint Paul on the Holy Mountain.

Christ is born in a stable with animals in it, and is venerated by herdsmen. We see that ordinary people, as well as irrational nature, accept God simply and naturally.

Our Lady gave birth to Christ outside her home, on a journey, in a place other than where she lived. This shows that God can be born where we don't expect Him, even in strange places, among people who are probably strangers to the framework we've erected. But wherever He's born- and the choice and the reason for it is entirely His- He'll bring peace and love and will warm people's soul, insofar as they want Him to, of course. If they don't, He won't, as was the case with Herod.

The flight into Egypt, where Joseph, Mary and the Child went after being warned by an angel in a dream, in order to escape the insanity of Herod:

There are a number of points here. Joseph was warned by an angel and this is an indication of the faith and trust required to achieve salvation. Just as it was necessary for Joseph to trust the angel in order to save the young Christ, so we, too, are called upon to show our own trust. Herod's madness indicates the persecution of God which the powerful strive to set in motion.

We see that Christ, as a human person, 'needs', the help of other people- his mother and Joseph. This shows that God has people who defend Him against others who want to remove Him from our lives. These people who trust in Him keep Him alive on this earth of ours and have the joy of seeing Him 'growing', as Joseph and Mary did, and working miracles.

