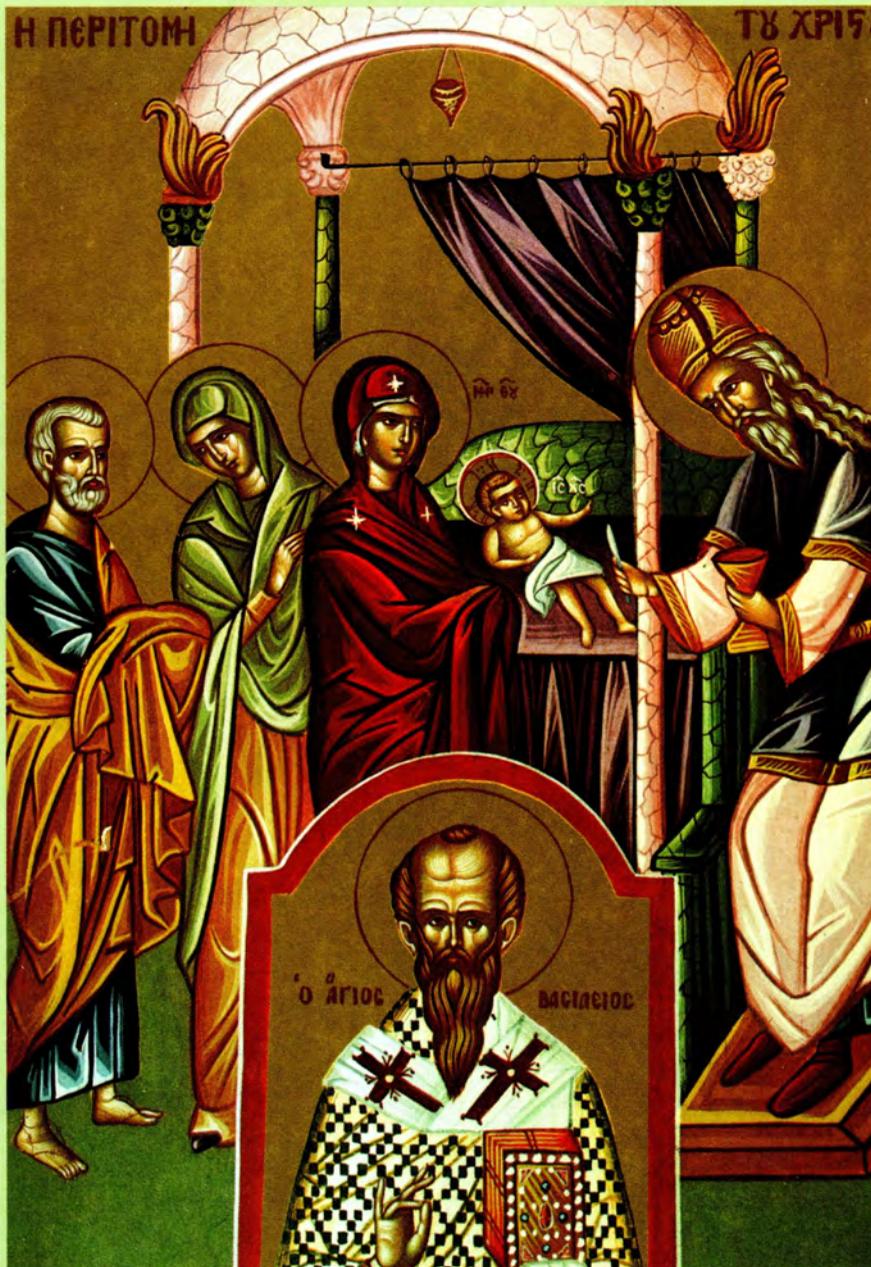


CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD
SAINT BASIL THE GREAT



Icon of the Circumcision -- January 1st

Reflections on the Scripture Readings for this Weekend

On this first day of the New Year we remember not only Jesus Christ's initiation into Judaism and the conferral of His name but also the death of one of the three great Cappadocian Fathers, St. Basil the Great. Our readings for this weekend, which are taken from the second letter to Paul to Timothy and his letter to the Colossians as well as the first chapter of Mark's Gospel and the second chapter of Luke's Gospel. The passage from second Timothy conveys Paul's thoughts on the reward for fidelity to faith in Jesus Christ and the passage from Mark's Gospel recounts John the Baptizer advising his followers that one greater than he would be coming, namely Jesus, the Christ.

The passage from Colossians conveys Paul's thoughts on the sovereign role of Christ. He states that our commitment to Christ is analogous to being circumcised in Him. Paul writes this:

In Christ the fullness of deity resides in bodily form. Yours is a share of this fullness, in him who is the head of every principality and power. You were also circumcised in him, not with the circumcision administered by hand but with Christ's circumcision which strips off the carnal body completely.

The passage from Luke's Gospel actually shares the historical event of Christ being named and then sharing another event in the Lord's life, namely Him being found by His parents in the Temple when he was twelve. So what message can we glean from these very different readings.

It seemed to me that a common theme in all of these readings is commitment! Even the story of John the Baptizer presented at the beginning of Mark's Gospel is all about commitment and recognition of Jesus Christ as our sovereign Lord. A real commitment to attempting to live like Jesus truly leads to our finding the true meaning and



purpose of life.

Commitment to following God's way of living leads to finding why we are here on earth. I believe this can truly be said of St. Basil the Great. He gave himself completely and totally to imitating Jesus Christ. He made a real commitment to the Gospel of Jesus and gained fullness of life.

We have been initiated into the Christian faith just as Jesus was initiated into the faith of His earthly parents. His commitment to living God's way resulted in Him doing the will of God. So too are we called to do the will of God. We can accomplish this by living as Jesus lived.

Let us imitate Jesus!

Understanding Our Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

The next important event in the life of Jesus following His birth, was His circumcision and “naming.” This event, in accord with tradition, took place eight days after His birth.

This practice became a law among the Israelites at the time of Abraham. It is a symbol of their covenant with God. For Jewish people this practice is a sign of being a member of the people of God. It means submitting oneself to the law and its duties. Through this act every Jewish male becomes a participant in the blessing and promises God made to His people. It is required for participation in the yearly paschal sacrifice. A man is excommunicated from the Jewish people for non-observance of this law. Since God, in the Person of Jesus, came into the world as a human being in a Jewish community, He embraced this observance.

This feast originated and developed first in the Western Church and later passed over to the Eastern Church. It became a part of the Church calendar to counteract the pagan practices that typically took place on the first day of a New Year.

In the East, the feast seems to have become universal during the eighth and ninth centuries, for at that time,

the Byzantine calendars assigned this feast and that of St. Basil the Great to the first of January.

This feast celebrates two events: Jesus’ initiation into the Jewish people and the conferral of His name, which means “savior.” Hence, this feast is also called the “Naming of Jesus Christ.”



This feast is not one of the twelve major feasts of our Church, however. As such it has neither a pre-nor post-feast. It brings to a close, strictly speaking, the post-feast of Christ’s Nativity.

The feast speaks to us of sacrifice and self-denial. There is no genuine service of God without the observance of God’s commandments and the fulfillment of Christian duties. God, in the Person of Jesus, modeled that it is important to make a sincere commitment to living the way God revealed through the Person of Jesus.

The naming of Jesus reminds us of the holiness and power of that name and its great significance. God Himself, through the mediation of an angel speaking to Joseph in a dream, gave this name to Christ.

In the Eastern Church the JESUS PRAYER is a prayer of great power. We are encouraged to call upon God in the name of Jesus.

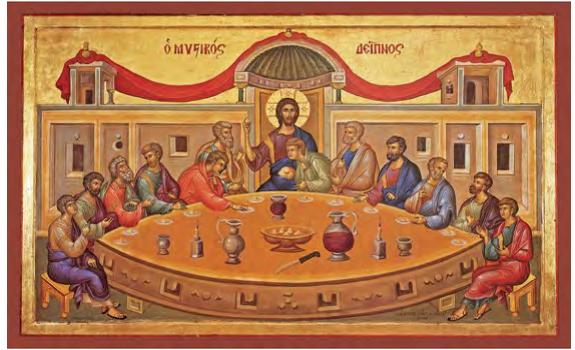
The Divine Liturgy and Our Worship of God

During this holy time, our worship is filled with special prayers that convey the meaning of what we celebrate. In today's **Tropar** for our Christ-feast, we pray:

O Jesus, enthroned on high together with Your eternal Father and Divine Spirit, You condescended to be born on earth of a maiden and virgin mother. And on the eighth day You were circumcised. Praised be Your plan of salvation! Praised by Your condescension, O Lord! You alone love mankind.

We need to pause and think about what we pray. We believe that indeed God has a plan for our salvation. He has, through the circumstances of our lives, allowed us to be initiated into the Christian faith - belief in the great love that our Creator-God has for us. We believe that His love is so great that He came into our world to help us actualize the potential within us to become like Him, as He is known in the Person of Jesus.

The true meaning and purpose of our lives is to share the fullness of God's own life. We were created in His image and have the ability, if we truly cooperate with God, to grow in His likeness. As we grow in His likeness we grow in our awareness of how very much our Creator-God loves us. To know we are loved unconditionally is perhaps the most profound of all possible human feelings. It gives us the strength and courage to meet all of life's challenges.



On this day we also pray this second **Tropar**.

Your voice resounds throughout the world which has accepted the lessons so well taught by you. You have given explanation of divine truths. You have clarified the nature of created things. You have made a rule of life for men. By your royal priesthood, O venerable Father Basil, intercede with Christ to save our souls.

We offer yet a third special prayer this day in the honor of the Mother of God. We pray:

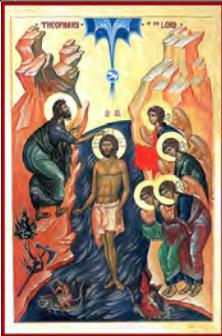
In You, O Woman Full of Grace, the angelic choirs and the human race - all creation - rejoices. O Sanctified Temple, Mystical Paradise, and Glory of Virgins, He, Who is our God from before all ages, took flesh from you and became a child. He made your womb a throne, and greater than the heavens. In you, O Woman Full of Grace, all creation rejoices. All praise be to you.

If you didn't reflect on these prayers during the Liturgy, why not take time now to do so.



St. Michael's Parish News

A Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in Dearborn Michigan



THIS WEEK

On Friday of this coming week, our Church celebrate the great feast of the Baptism of Christ, know as Theophany. By Church Tradition we prepare for this

feast by “fasting and abstaining” on the day before, Thursday, January 5.

We shall celebrate this great feast as a community and with the Great Blessing of Water on Sunday, January 8th. In this feast God made Himself know to humankind in the Person of Jesus Christ.

THE NEW YEAR

It is my prayer as your pastor that this New Year of 2017 will bring to all of our members an abundance of health, joy, love, happiness and peace. May this year be one of spiritual growth for all of us. I would also thank all those who, during the past year, supported the parish and helped maintain it. I would thank the Parish Council for their help.

**Your life does not get better
by chance, it gets better
by change**

CALLED TO HOLINESS

During these winter feasts we hear the call to holiness truly expressed by the call to embrace personal transformation and to do all in our power to become more like Jesus - to grow in our



likeness of God. Jesus is God's real revelation to humankind with regard to the meaning and purpose of life. As we work to become more like Him, we in fact become more like the person that God created us to be. When God created us He had a vision of “all that we can possibly become” during this lifetime. He came Himself to show us that it is possible for us to become deeply aware of the fact that we are His adopted children. In order to truly be His children, we must learn how to allow His Spirit, which is within us, to guide us through this earthly life. His Spirit gives us the power or ability to imitate Jesus.

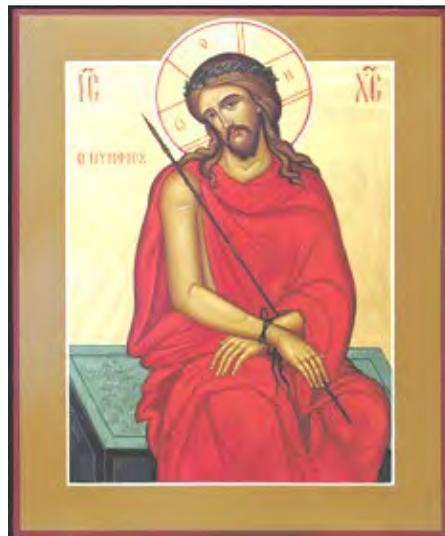
It is always important to remember that what we “intend” is critical. So we are called to think about our lives and then decide/intend to do all in our power, in cooperation with God's Spirit, to work towards the goal of becoming like Jesus.

(Continued on page 8)

Acquiring the Mind of Christ

In the last issue of the article, I began sharing thoughts about *prayer* being essential not only for *salvation*, which indeed is achieved by *acquiring the mind of Christ*. The Apostle Paul exhorts all Christians to “pray without ceasing”. This task is great and is often one of the most difficult to pursue, precisely because prayer affords such great reward: peace, life, renewal, enlightenment, joy in the Holy Spirit, and ultimately our salvation. Our Lord asks each one of us: “Could you not watch with me one hour?” “Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation” and fall away from your spiritual life. “What I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”

In this context of prayer, watchfulness is the key to our inner life. It allows for a healthy distance from our thoughts and potential release from our passions. The Jesus Prayer is essential in helping us to build up a sense of watchfulness in our hearts and thoughts, enabling us to detach from them to some degree; for we are not our thoughts. St. Theophan tells us that the principle asceticism of the spiritual life is keeping our mind and heart from passionate movement and thought. The Jesus Prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,” (*our just the name Jesus, or Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me*) is an essential tool of enabling us to overcome the deadly sinful movements of the mind and heart. The Jesus Prayer has become one of the most powerful prayers in the Eastern Church. This short prayer is a remedy and defense against every kind of darkness. St. Isaac the Syrian even says that the Name of Christ *is* light. When we use this light against the onslaught of temptations, we dispel their darkness.

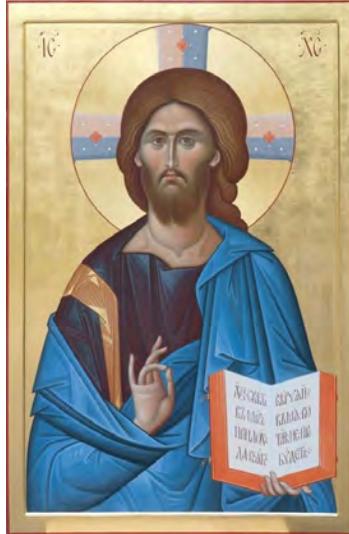


Elder Zacharias explains that the easiest way to become the Temple of the Holy Spirit is through the invocation of the Name of Jesus Christ. In this way, we open the heart to the grace of God. However, Elder Sophrony reminds us that it is essential to love the One we invoke. And how do we love Him? The Lord tells us, as St. John shares in his Gospel: “If you love me, then keep my commandments.” Since these commandments exceed human measure, they can only be fulfilled with the power of prayer.

To which commandments is Jesus referring? Think about this! The Jesus commandments are how many? Do you know the answer to these questions?

Gaining a Deeper Understanding of Our Faith

In this article I have been exploring the ideas of our “Fathers in the Faith” with regard to the Eastern Church’s ideas about the role of Christ as our Savior. If Athanasius and Cyril, by defending the divinity of Christ and the unity of his being, provided Christian spirituality with its essential basis, their names and their messages remained somewhat controversial even after their deaths. One of the major reasons for the bitter theological debates that followed was that zealous followers of the two great masters tended to freeze their doctrines into verbal formulas. These were accepted literally and out of the context provided by the spiritual experience of the catholic (*meaning universal and not the western Church*) tradition and the theology of the masters themselves. The struggle of Athanasius centered on the Nicæan creed and, in particular, the Greek term *homoousios* (*which means consubstantial*), used in that creed to affirm the common divine “essence” or “substance” of the Father and the Son. But the same term was used by Sabellians or modalists, who indeed interpreted “consubstantiality” as incompatible with the Trinitarian revelation of God. For Sabellians, to say that the Father and the Son are of “one



essence” meant that God was not three persons, but a unique essence with only three aspects or “modes” of manifestation. Thus, the Nicæan and Athanasian formulation of the Christian experience - true as it was in its opposition to Arianism - needed further terminological and conceptual elaboration. Indeed Athanasius and the Fathers realized that all words have nuances and they were extremely careful to find the exact words to express what they, and therefore we Christians believe about God. In the Trinity there are, according to our belief, three distinct and complete Persons and the Son and the Spirit and not just different and unique manifestations of the One Father-Creator.

Indeed the needed elaboration was provided by the Cappadocian fathers with their doctrine of the three divine *hypostases*, or really distinct persons. It did not imply any disavowal of Athanasius but actually a more sophisticated and nuanced use of Greek philosophical terms. Indeed the Cappadocians - truly better versed than Athanasius in ancient Greek thought - were more successful than he was in showing the incompatibility between biblical trinitarianism and Greek philosophical categories!

Schedule of Services

Sunday, January 1 - Circumcision of Our Lord - St. Basil
10:00 AM + John Kushner; John & Janet Dicky (40th Day)

29th Weekend After Pentecost - Tone 1

Monday, January 2 - Sylvester, Pope
No Liturgy Scheduled

Tuesday, January 3 - Malachy, Prophet
No Liturgy Scheduled

Wednesday, January 4 - Synaxis of the 70 Apostles
No Liturgy Scheduled

Thursday, January 5 - Vigil of Theophany
No Liturgy Scheduled

Friday, January 6 - THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD
8:00 AM - Special Intention

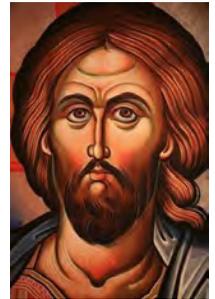
Saturday, January 7 - Synaxis of John the Baptist
No Liturgy Scheduled

Sunday, January 8 - Weekend after Theophany
Parochial Celebration of Theophany - Solemn Blessing of Water
10:00 AM + Joseph, Ann and Sharon

(Continued from page 5 - Called to Holiness)

If we do this, then we achieve the meaning and purpose of our life. We are here on this earth and at this in history, to accomplish something. What? To truly become "children of God." If God had not become incarnate in the Person of Jesus - if He had not become a human being - we would not know how to accomplish this. As it is, He came into our world and lived among us in order to show us how this can be accomplished. He did all this out of love for us.

Hopefully, all of us will come to a point during this lifetime that we will have no doubt about the meaning and purpose of our lives. Finding our true meaning and purpose is the only way that we can also achieve true and lasting happiness. Happiness comes knowing who we are and why we exist.



St. Michael the Archangel
Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church
6340 Chase Road
Dearborn, MI 48126

Rev. Wayne J. Ruchgy, Ph.D.
Pastor

Rectory: (313) 582-1424
Cell: (313) 580-4412
WRuchgy@gmail.com

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Sundays @ 10:00 AM
Ukrainian & English

Weekdays @ 8:00 AM
English

SACRAMENTS

Penance
By Appointment

Baptism & Matrimony
*In most instances membership
required for six months*

Funerals
*Membership of an immediate
family member required*

Parish Life Council

Bob & Corinne Boyko
734.451.1893

John & Janet Dicky
313.563.5509

Daria Drobny
313.791-0292

Robert Krokosky
248.431.9554

Leo & Mary LaDouceur
313.278.7378

Gordon Malaniak
734.564.9817

Leonard Mier
313.584-6795

Greg & Esther Petrovich
734.453-4354

Rafic Vawter
313.624.9867

<http://www.stmichaelarchangel.org> - and - [Facebook.com/stmichaelugccdbn](https://www.facebook.com/stmichaelugccdbn)

Gaining a Deeper Understanding of the New Testament

In the last edition of this article, I was sharing thoughts about *Jesus as the word* - the revelation of God. I ended the last edition of this article sharing this: “as the resurrection appearance at Emmaus indicates, the very first generation of Christians situated proclamation of the Word in an ecclesial-liturgical setting. The risen Lord draws near to two of His disciples and inquires as to the subject of their animated conversation. As in other resurrection appearances, “their eyes were kept from recognizing Him”. In response to His question, Cleopas offers a summary of the events concerning Jesus’ condemnation, His passion and death, as well as an account of the empty tomb. In all, his account represents a portion of the earliest *kerygma*, modified by the Evangelist Luke to provide a dramatic setting for Jesus’ reply: “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into His glory?” Then, retracing the typological events of the Old Testament that He Himself fulfilled in His life and sacrificial mission, Jesus “interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

Although their “hearts burned within them” at Christ’s proclamation, their eyes remained veiled. Only at the

table of which He is both guest and host, do they finally recognize this stranger to be their crucified and risen master. “When He was at table with them, taking bread He blessed, and having broken it, He gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him.” As the parallel passages recounting the institution of the Lord’s Supper make unmistakably clear, the meal at Emmaus, shared by the risen Christ and His disciples, is an image of the Eucharistic celebration of the early Church.



What will subsequently be called the “Liturgy of the Word,” proclamation on the basis of scriptural revelation occurs on the Jerusalem road leading to the village. In ancient Byzantine rites, preserved and celebrated today by Our Church, this act of revelation and proclamation is preceded by the Small Entrance. Originally the bishop entered the church at this moment. Now, at this point, the bishop makes his “entry” into the altar, preceded by the elevated Word. Until this moment, the Gospel book has rested upon the altar table: the Word of God remains invisible, yet is ever present, as in the period of the Old Covenant. With the singing of the Second Antiphon, the Word of God comes into our midst... **To do what?**

Learning Our Faith From the Greek Fathers of the Church

In the last issue of this article, I began a presentation of the questions that the Church pondered in seven basic theological areas. The Fathers answers to the questions in each of these seven areas have formed the foundation of the theology that our Church embraces. I presented the first four areas and the questions in each. The last three areas are:

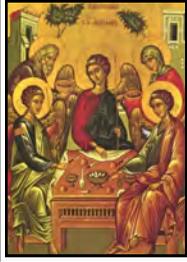
- The question of humanity: What is a human being? What does the Scripture mean when it states that human beings have been created in the image of God? How and to what extent has sin affected and infected human nature?
- The question of the church: What is the church? How is the church related to Christ? What is the church's task on earth? How does one enter the church? What are the church's marks? How is the life of the church nourished and strengthened? What are the dangers the church can expect to encounter in its mission and ministry on earth?
- The question of the future: What will happen in the future? When will Christ return? What is the resurrection of the dead? What will occur at the last judgment?

Using these seven areas and the questions that are a part of them, I would like to begin sharing how the "Fathers" of the Church" struggled to find answers to all the questions that these areas raised.

I would first, however, like to present some ideas about who we consider the Fathers of the Church. The idea of a "father in the faith" has a rich and fruitful background in the Bible and in the ancient world. Paul, for example, describes himself as a "father" to the members of the Corinthian congregation, distinguishing the role of a father from that of a mere guardian. The term *father* also occurred in rabbinic, Cynic and Pythagorean circles. Early Christian writers such as Clement of Rome, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria all employ the term. Irenaeus speaks, not



only of the student as one "who has received the teaching from another's mouth" as a son, but also of one's instructor as a "father." A father in the faith, then, is someone who is familiar with the teachings concerning the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and can be trusted to hand on faithfully and correctly the tradition that he himself has already received. Rootedness in the gospel and indeed trustworthiness of character are non-negotiable in the life of a father. There were also trusted mothers in the faith.



THE EASTERN HERALD

СХІДНИЙ ВІСНИК

The Weekly Newsletter of Very Reverend Canon Wayne J. Ruchgy, Ph.D.
Vol. 63 No 1 First Weekend of the New Year December 31 - January 1, 2017

The Spirituality of the Christian East

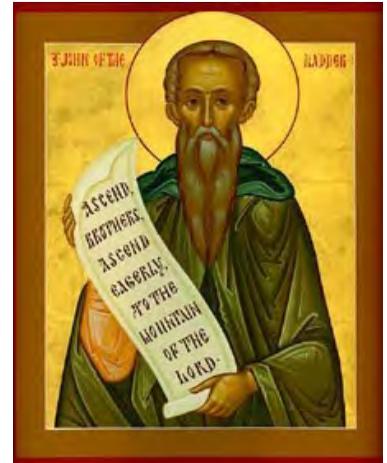
When last I shared information about the *Ladder* of St. John Climacus, it was about his Step 28 which is **PRAYER**. This step has several different sections and is one of the more lengthy Steps on his ladder. I last briefly shared thoughts about *Spoken Prayer*.

John suggests that the most helpful way to learn to pray through the services of the Church is with a prayer book. Such books give us a structure for prayer. They show us that the Eastern Church typically concludes prayers with expressing honor and praise to the Holy Trinity Who we call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Even our prayers of supplication to the Mother of God and the saints traditionally are concluded in this manner.

Praying through prayer books is not the only form of spoken prayer. While these help us to pray as an Eastern Christian, we often find that such prayer can be dry: we end up reciting prayers without meaning them or understanding them. Certainly we should persist in saying these prayers. For the more accustomed we grow to using them, the easier it will be for these prayers to become our own and to be carried into the second stage of prayer: mental prayer.

But in addition to using set prayers, we can pray in our own words. Such prayer is by no means unacceptable. On the contrary, our own words can be the most powerful prayers of all.

Our prayers should be simple. Christ Himself warns us about verbosity and saying too much in



prayer. Matthew quotes Jesus saying: “When you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do”. Why? Because “your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.”

Notwithstanding the above, it is not easy to spend more than a few moments in prayer with limited words. So when we are beginning to learn how to pray, we should limit our spontaneous prayers. ***More to follow.***

The Mystery of the Lord's Baptism

The Gospel tells us that the Lord went to the Jordan River to be baptized and that He wished to consecrate Himself in the river by signs from heaven. Someone might ask, "Why would a holy man desire baptism?" Listen to the answer: Christ is baptized, not to be made holy by the water, but to make the water holy, and by His cleansing to purify the waters which He touched. For the consecration of Christ involves a more significant consecration of the water.

For when the Savior is washed all water for our baptism is made clean, purified at its source for the dispensing of baptismal grace to the people of future ages. Christ is the first to be baptized, then, so that Christians will follow after Him with confidence.

I understand the mystery as this. The column of fire went before the sons of Israel through the Red Sea so they could follow on their brave

journey; the column went first through the waters to prepare a path for those who followed. As the Apostle Paul said, what was accomplished then was the mystery of baptism. Clearly it was baptism in a certain sense when the cloud was covering the people and bringing them through the water.

But Christ the Lord does all these things: in the column of fire He went through the sea before the sons of Israel; so now, in the column of His body, He goes through baptism before the Christian people. At the time of the Exodus the column provided light for the people who followed; now it gives light to the hearts of believers. Then it made a firm pathway through the waters; now it strengthens the footsteps of faith in the bath of baptism.

Saint Maximus of Turin

**For more information on Eastern spirituality, visit
www.ecpubs.com**