

# SUNDAY AFTER THEOPHANY



*Icon of Saints Dominica, George, and Elladius -- January 8th*

## Reflections on the Scripture Readings for this Weekend

This weekend we celebrate the great feast of the Theophany as a spiritual community. It is truly recorded as one of the “theophanic” or “God-revealing” events in the life of Jesus and in human history. In Matthew’s version of the event, today’s Gospel, this was a spiritual event not only for the man Jesus but also for others. It reads:

After Jesus was baptized, he came directly out of the water. Suddenly the sky opened and *he* saw the Spirit of God descend like a dove and hover over him. With that, a voice from the heavens said, *“This is my beloved son. My favor rests on him”*.

As this reads, it is John the Baptizer who sees the dove and hears the voice. In Luke’s Gospel we also hear:

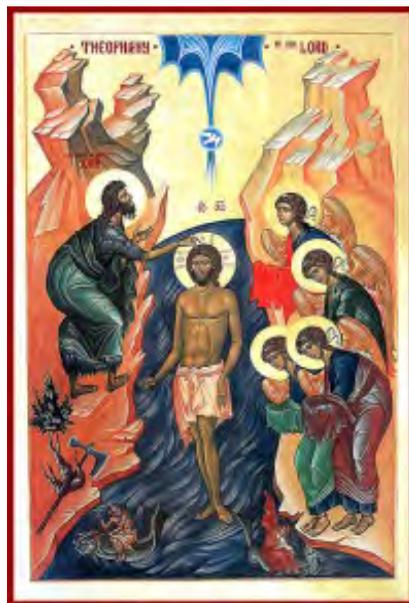
When all the people were baptized, and Jesus was at prayer after likewise being baptized, the skies opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in visible form like a dove. A voice from heaven was heard to say: *“You are my beloved Son. On you my favor rests”*.

Mark’s Gospel presents this event in this manner:

Immediately on coming up out of the water he saw the sky rent in two and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. Then a voice came from the heavens: *“You are my beloved Son. On you my favor rests”*.

The Church has picked Matthew’s version of this event - especially because of the wording of the voice from heaven - to signify that this event in Jesus’ life is also meant to be a revelation to humankind. One can easily get the impression from Mark and Luke’s versions that the words were heard only by Jesus.

In the story of the Lord’s Transfiguration, all three Synoptic Gospels report the voice from heaven saying: *“This is my beloved Son,”* clearly



sharing that the words were, because they were heard by the three Apostles, meant to be a revelation to all humankind as well as Jesus.

Truly the words of Paul to Titus support the fact that the Theophany is meant to reveal that **GOD IS WITH US**. Paul writes: *“The grace of God has appeared, offering salvation to all men.”* The events in Jesus’ life that we celebrate are meant to help us believe that God so loves us that He came to show us how to live and, therefore, eventually achieve the fullness of life, which is salvation.

## Understanding Our Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

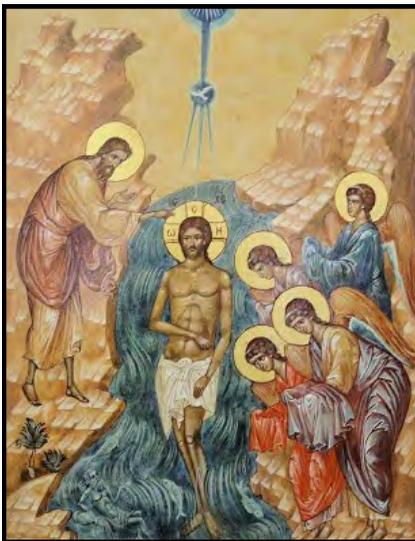
In the Book of Genesis, we read that creation began when the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters. (Gen. 1:2) Throughout the Bible, water plays an important and a 'mystical role' in human existence and in man's relationship with God the Creator.

Water has the capacity to produce death, as recounted in the story of Noah and the ark; or to produce life, as noted in the story of Moses' striking the rock in the desert to produce water for the Jews wandering in the desert. While the waters of the Red Sea parted to allow the Hebrews to pass over in safety (and thus preserve life), the same waters came rushing upon the Pharaoh and his army drowning them.

In the New Testament, we see water becoming the means by which the Trinity was revealed during the Baptism of Jesus. In the Baptism of Jesus, the spiritual significance and potential of water as the source of life is again revealed and reaffirmed just as in Genesis. St. John Chrysostom said in a sermon on Theophany, "On this day Christ was baptized. Through His Baptism He sanctified the element of water. Therefore let us all draw of the water and store it in homes, because on this day the water is consecrated."

The solemn blessing of water in our Church is ritually magnificent. For the blessing, the great prayer of Patriarch Sophronius is combined with ritualistic actions which convey great meaning to what is done.

It must be remembered that water, a symbol of life, is used in this ritual. Although we bless a container of water, its symbolism is what is important. The ritual in many areas is performed at lakes or rivers. There are four distinct ritual actions performed by the priest, each repeated three times to symbolize that they represent God's power: a three-branch candle is plunged into



the water; the priest breathes on the water; the priest parts the water with his right hand in the form of a cross; and he plunges his hand cross into the water. All of these actions indicate our belief that God's power and life-force penetrate all matter and living things. He is the source of existence for all of creation.

If you listened closely to the prayer that the priest prayed during this ritual I am sure that you had to be moved by its magnificence. It truly expresses our belief that God is the source of all living things and creation. We bow to His great love.

# The Divine Liturgy and Our Worship of God

Again I would interrupt my thoughts on the Divine Liturgy to draw your attention to the prayers that are special to the feast of Theophany. The proper prayers for the feast (i.e., the Tropar and Kondak) are magnificent statements of this feast. We pray this Tropar:

At Your baptism in the Jordan, O Lord, worship of the Trinity was revealed, for the Father's voice bore witness to You, calling You His "beloved Son", and the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the truth of these words. O Christ God, Who appeared and enlightened the world, glory be to You.

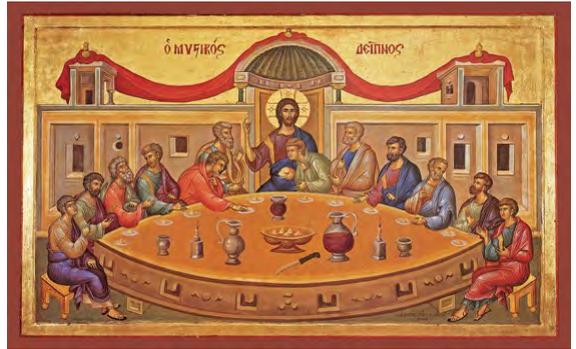
The Kondak likewise is an expression of our faith. We pray this Kondak:

You have revealed Yourself to the world today, and Your light, O Lord, has shined upon us. We recognize You and exclaim to You: "You have come and revealed Yourself, O Inaccessible Light."

There is also a special Irmos (i.e., the Hymn to the Mother of God that is said during the Anaphora) which is worth noting. We pray:

O my soul, extol Him Who was baptized in the Jordan, Christ the King. No tongue has the power to fittingly extol you; and even a supernatural mind is powerless to glorify You, O Mother of God. But in your graciousness, accept our faith because you know our holy ambition; for you are the Protectress of Christians, and we extol you.

I am sure that all who read this will



agree with me about the beauty and power of these words. I find that these prayers wonderfully express what we believe. The Tropar and Kondak tell us that God, through Christ's baptism, revealed to us that He is Three-In-One and that this revelation has "enlightened" the world. Our Church calls the baptism of Christ a "theophanic" event, that is an event which revealed to humankind that God is Triune and that one Person of our Triune God is both divine and human. This belief, it is my thought, truly gives meaning and purpose to human life.

The hymn to the Mother of God is likewise profound. It truly expresses what we believe about her and this particular belief is truly only accepted by Catholic and Orthodox Christians.

It is important that we think about what we believe when we pray these prayers. They are not just hollow words. They are statements of what we believe as Eastern Christians. Think about it. We can grow in our faith when we take the time to really assess what we pray. These are statements of our faith.



# St. Michael's Parish News

A Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in Dearborn Michigan

## CELEBRATING THEOPHANY



As we, a community of believers, celebrate the Feast of Theophany, we embrace the idea that God, through Jesus, has revealed Himself to be a Three-Person Union of

Divine Beings - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Further we express our belief, in partaking of the blessed water, that we believe that the life-force that pervades our entire universe and us is God's own life-force. When you take the blessed water home, you are encouraged to bless your home, put some in your food and the food of your pets and even use a little to wash your face, all the while make little acts of faith, believing that God is truly with us and in us.

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## OUR LITURGICAL FUTURE

On January 29th, we begin the five week period before the Great Fast. The Great Fast begins on February 26th. Easter will be celebrated on April 16th. This year, both Old and New Calendar Easter is the same!

**Change your thoughts and you change your world.**

## CALLED TO HOLINESS

A real part of the call to holiness is a call to our personal recognition of God sharing His life with us. The call to holiness is a call to a deeper awareness and belief in the revelation that God has made to us about life and creation.



So the call to holiness requires that we attempt to find answers to several questions that we must ask of ourselves after real reflection. The questions are: **DO I TRULY BELIEVE THAT THE:**

- life-force *within me* is indeed God's own life-force which He is sharing with me and all other living things?
- meaning and purpose of earthly life is to grow in the likeness of God as seen in the human person of Jesus?
- love of God is directly connected to love of my neighbor?
- Kingdom of God is here right now and not just something that becomes real after death? and
- challenges of life are not tests or punishments but rather opportunities for me to grow in my relationship with God?

These are some of the important questions

*(Continued on page 8)*

## Gaining a Deeper Understanding of Our Faith

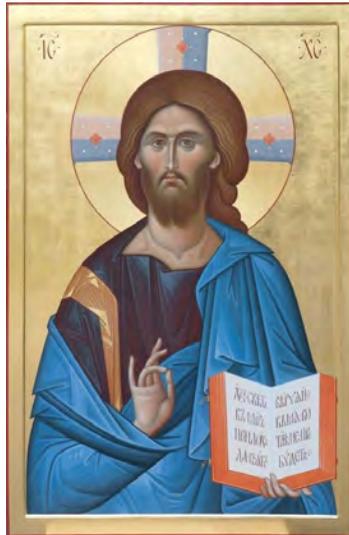
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I shared, in the last issue of this article, that the Cappadocian Fathers used ancient Greek thought to clarify the ideas of Athanasius about who Christ is. They accomplished this by using Greek, philosophical vocabulary as a tool, changing its meaning and making it into a manageable instrument of Christian witness. An example of this is how they used of the Greek words *homoousios* and *hypostases* (which I hope my regular readers already come to know).

The same - actually almost identical - process took place in the fifth century after the triumph of Cyril over Nestorius. This process is connected with the famous decree of the Council of Chalcedon (451). Cyril's Christology has been both kerygmatic and polemical. Eutyches - a zealous, ultra-Cyrrillian ascetic - interpreted the unity of divinity and humanity of Christ to mean that humanity was so totally "deified" that it ceased to be "our" humanity. According to him, Christ was certainly "consubstantial" with the Father, but not "with us." His humanity was absorbed by God. Eutyches was formally faithful to the Christology of Cyril, but in fact he was depriving it of its meaning for human salvation: God, according to Eutyches, was not sharing human destiny - human birth, human

suffering, human death itself - but, while remaining absolute, changeless and transcendent, was absorbing that human identity which he had originally created. Was he then still the God of love?

Hopefully my readers are coming to understand that the struggle that existed in the early Church was to come to an acceptable (orthodox) understanding of WHO JESUS IS. The understanding of Eutyches was, of course, found to be false. The Council of Chalcedon (451) came as a reaction again Eutyches' expression of who Jesus is. But the Council's statement of Who Christ is was a rather elaborate formula which resulted from long debates and was intended to satisfy the different existing terminological traditions: the Alexandrian, the Antiochene and the Latin (these were the three main schools of theological thought). The latter expressed itself in the powerful intervention of Pope Leo the Great in his letter to Flavian of Constantinople. In this famous text, the pope, using a terminology inherited from Tertullian and Augustine, carefully established the integrity of the two natures of Christ, and insisted that this integrity requires that each nature preserve its characteristics.



## Acquiring the Mind of Christ

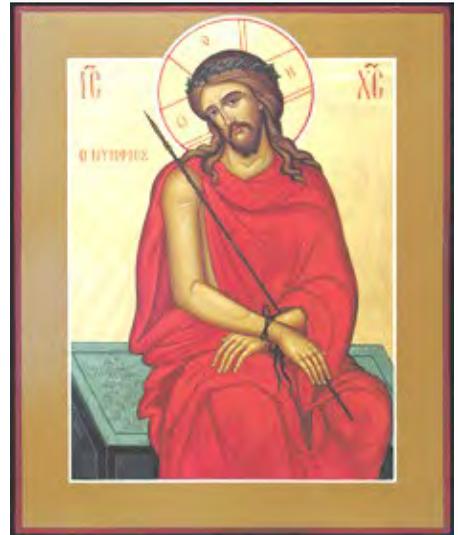
Acquiring the “mind” of Christ requires us to first develop the habit of prayer. If we are to start the task of prayer, we must immediately begin and not procrastinate. We should not be motivated by a lot of excitement or self praise, thinking that we are owed something great for our spiritual effort. It is our privilege and joy to converse with our God, being the purpose for which we were created.

It is imperative that we see personal and corporate prayer as two sides of the same coin. Corporate liturgical prayer (*that which we do as a community*) life in the Church feeds into and provides invaluable and essential shape for our interior life. Corporate prayer life can become dead and frozen without the inner attention and fire which personal prayer gives us. Inner life, if not well-grounded in the liturgical life of the Church, can possibly lead us to delusion.

Today is the day of salvation, and we must never put off prayer for another time. Every moment is the moment to turn to the Lord, to thank the Lord for all His innumerable benefits, to beseech aid from on high, to repent and ask for forgiveness and to ask His blessing. The most essential part of prayer is the inner turning of the heart to the Lord.

The classic textbook definition of prayer given by St. Theophan the Recluse is “standing with the mind in the heart before the Lord.” It is imperative that, as we pray, our attention remains in our heart as much as possible. As the mind wanders, we simply bring it back to the heart and to the words of the prayer.

Another essential key to this new life of prayer is learning to listen to God. I believe that I have written about this before. God IS always



speaking to us but we are often so busy monologuing with ourselves that we may not be able to hear Him. It is important that we not only approach prayer as union with God but also with a receptive listening heart, waiting on the Lord like the Prophet Samuel: “Yes, Lord, thy servant is listening.” This means that we cultivate silence and watchfulness in our prayer time so that it is not just filled with our requests; we make room to hear from the Lord His requests from us. However, He won’t always speak to us in the manner in which we might expect.

Quite often His responses come my way of “insights” or sudden thoughts that move us to do something.

# Schedule of Services

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

## **Sunday, January 8 - Weekend after Theophany**

*Parochial Celebration of Theophany - Solemn Blessing of Water*

**10:00 AM + Joseph, Ann and Sharon**  
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## **30th Weekend After Pentecost - Tone 2**

Monday, January 9 - Polyeuct, Martyr

*No Liturgy Scheduled*

Tuesday, January 10 - Gregory of Nyssa, Bishop

*No Liturgy Scheduled*

Wednesday, January 11 - Theodosius, Venerable

*No Liturgy Scheduled*

Thursday, January 12 - Tatiana, Martyr

*No Liturgy Scheduled*

Friday, January 13 - Hermolae & Stratonicus, Martyrs

*No Liturgy Scheduled*

Saturday, January 14 - Venerable Fathers of Sinai & Raitho

*No Liturgy Scheduled*

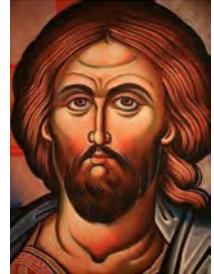
## **Sunday, January 15 - 35th Weekend after Pentecost - Tone 2**

**10:00 AM + Walter Kizel; John & Janet Dicky**

*(Continued from page 5 - Called to Holiness)*

that each of us must find answers to if we are to grow in holiness. The call to holiness is a call to fully become the person God intended when He created you - to become a true child of God.

Our religion is not a bunch of silly superstitions or notions. It is based on the belief that God, in His great love for us, became a human person Himself, in the Person of His Son, to help us understand how to live in order to truly become His child and to achieve the fullness of life. Of course He leaves it up to us. He does not force us to do anything. He only reveals His love for us and shows us the way to live in order to achieve the goal of salvation - true knowledge of who God is, who our neighbors are, who we are and the meaning and purpose of life. We, however, have free will and so the choice is ours. ***What is your choice?***



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

## **Gaining a Deeper Understanding of the New Testament**

I have been sharing in this article the “sacramental” power of the Word of God, the Gospels. It is our tradition that the Gospel Book remains at all times on the Throne (i.e., altar). In the very beginning of the Divine Liturgy, the Word of God is invisible to us, yet it is ever present. This symbolizes how the Word was hidden from us during the period of the Old Covenant. After the Great Litany, the Gospel Book is brought solemnly from the altar area (i.e., the sanctuary) and carried through the midst of the assembly of believers. This is to symbolize the Word coming into the world. It is carried through the Assembly to symbolically lead believers back to God. The procession with the Gospel Book comes from the area of the church which represents heaven, carried through the nave, which represents the present world of faith, only to once again enter into the altar area. God came in His Word, His Son, to lead us back to Him - to His Kingdom. The Gospel Book is then once again enthroned on the Throne, there only to await the time when it is proclaimed to the Assembly.

However enriching the Gospel reading or sermon about the reading may be, revelation of the divine Word remains incomplete before celebration

of the Eucharistic mystery. As in the experience of the disciples at Emmaus, the gathered community only “perceives” the full revelation, it only opens its eyes to a true understanding and acceptance of the divine word, through a personal and intimate *communion* in the divine gifts of Christ’s Body and Blood. The Liturgy of the Word thus comes to fulfillment in and through the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the Mystery of Mysteries that alone has the power to transform the Word from a message about Jesus into a participation in His divine life.



This I believe is a very important point. The power of the Word of God, that is the Gospel, only become real when we have a real and personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Hopefully

the reception of Communion, that is the Body and Blood of Christ, makes this transformation real in our lives. It is only when we truly feel one with Jesus Christ that we can come to really come to understand the Gospel - that is the Word of God.

The necessity of such a “eucharistic fulfillment” of the Word compels us to make ourselves worthy to receive Holy Communion. This requires that we find ways to “prepare” ourselves for the worthy reception of Communion.

***A Lot to Think About***

# Learning Our Faith From the Greek Fathers of the Church

In the last installment of this article, I began sharing a brief introduction to the Fathers of the Church. If you have been reading my Bulletin, I know that you have repeated read my references to the Fathers of the Church. I'd like to share some information about who they are since they are the foundation of Tradition.

The idea of preserving and faithfully passing on the apostolic teachings concerning the meaning of Jesus is clearly evident in the era of the Trinitarian and Christological controversies. Bishops who faithfully preserved and protected the conciliar decisions of the key councils such as Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381) and Chalcedon (451) received the title "father". The church considered these Christian leaders worthy of special honor and regard for preserving the true catholic and orthodox teaching during times marked by severe testing and also occasional persecution.

Vincent of Lerins describes the fathers of the church as people who "each in his own time and place" remained "in the unity of communion and the faith" and were "accepted as approved masters." Vincent argues that "whatsoever these may be found to have held, with one mind and one consent, ought to be accounted the true and catholic doctrine of the Church, without any doubt or scruple."

In addition, four key criteria are often employed to determine whether a particular Christian teacher qualifies as a father of the church. These are the four key criteria.

**ANTIQUITY.** A father lived and ministered from roughly the close of the first century (ca. 96) to the time of John of Damascus (750).

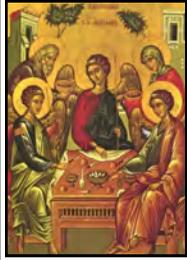
**HOLINESS OF LIFE.** Holiness we do not meant to mean perfection, as though the fathers were angels in human form. Most were intensely human and struggled with the same shortcomings and temptations common to humanity.



**TRUE DOCTRINE.** Since the fathers were true teachers of the church, two key points pertain here. First, a father must have left behind a body of teaching, however, small it might be. Second, this teaching must line up with apostolic tradition.

## **CHURCH APPROVAL.**

The Church itself must identify and approve the teachings and lives of those who would receive the title *Church Father*. No one can claim the title for himself. Some highly significant early Christian writers failed to receive this title from the Church because of doubtful orthodoxy.



# THE EASTERN HERALD

## СХІДНИЙ ВІСНИК

The Weekly Newsletter of Very Reverend Canon Wayne J. Ruchgy, Ph.D.  
Vol. 63 No 2                      Weekend After Theophany                      January 7-8, 2017

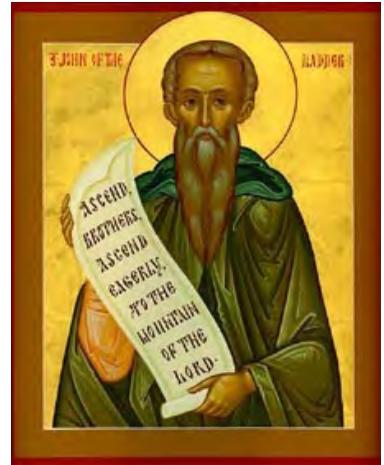
### The Spirituality of the Christian East

In the last several issues of the article, I have been considering the 28th Step on Climacus' *Ladder of Ascent*. That step deals with **PRAYER**. St. John has much to say about prayer. When we are still learning to pray, we may end up asking for the wrong things. We allow our passions to dictate the petitions we make to God. So it is no wonder that our prayers are not always answered. But praying for others - even if we are praying for something we think is best for that person, when God knows it is not - is unselfish. We think of charity as being something that concerns only material things - giving food or money to the needy - but prayer itself is an act of charity: we give up some of our time to dedicate to praying for others. Even if we are not experts in prayer and possess a weak faith, we should not refuse to pray for others, nor should we think our faith is the reason our prayers for them have been answered.

St. John states so clearly this:

Do not refuse a request to pray for the soul of another, even when you yourself lack the gift of prayer. For often the very faith of the person making the request will evoke the saving contrition of the one who is to offer the prayer. Do not become conceited when you have prayed for others and have been heard, for it is their faith which has been active and efficacious.

During our set times of prayer, we can often be distracted by thoughts - conversations we had, things we are anxious about, someone who has upset us, and so on. We should not allow these



distractions to make us give up praying. We must persist; otherwise we will never learn to overcome such distractions and we will end up praying less and less. Those making a beginning of prayer, frequently become distracted and have to make a conscious effort to bring their minds back to the task at hand. All will come with practice and patience. Stay focused on the task at hand and don't give up.

## *The Gift of the Holy Spirit to All Mankind*

In a plan of surpassing beauty the Creator of the universe decreed the renewal of all things in Christ. In His design for restoring human nature to its original condition, He gave a promise that He would pour out on it the Holy Spirit along with His other gifts, for otherwise our nature could not enter once more into the peaceful and secure possession of those gifts.

He therefore appointed a time for the Holy Spirit to come upon us: this was the time of Christ's coming. He gave this promise when He said: In those days, that is, the days of the Savior, I will pour out a share of my Spirit on all mankind.

The Only-begotten Son received the

Spirit, but not for His own advantage, for the Spirit is His, and is given in Him and through Him, as we have already said. He receives it to renew our nature in its entirety and to make it whole again, for in becoming man He took our entire nature to Himself. If we reason correctly, and use also the testimony of Scripture, we can see that Christ did not receive the Spirit for Himself, but rather for us in Him; for it is also through Christ that all gifts come down to us.

*Saint Cyril of Alexandria*

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