

SUNDAY AFTER THEOPHANY (EPIPHANY)
SYNAXIS OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST



Icon of Saint John the Baptist

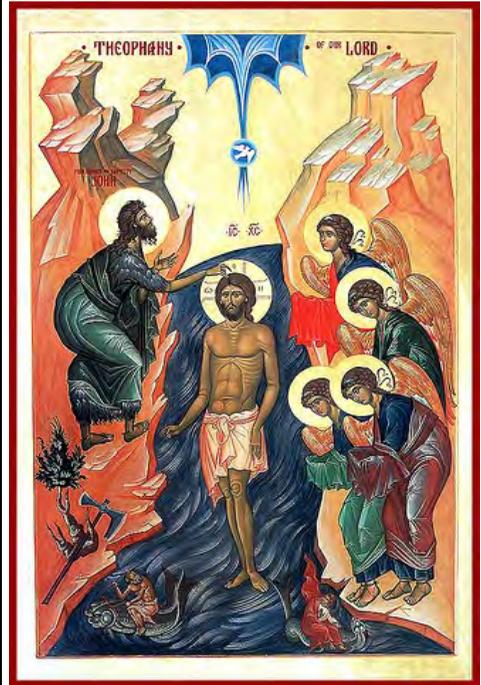
Reflections on the Scripture Readings for this Weekend

As we celebrate the second greatest feast in our Church, our readings are taken from Paul's letter to Titus and Matthew's Gospel. As you might suspect, the Gospel retells the story of the Lord's Baptism by John in the Jordan. We hear John's words to the Lord: *I should be baptized by you, yet you come to me.* We also hear something which the Gospel infers was heard: *This is my beloved Son. My favor rests on him.*

The story of the Lord's Baptism appears in all three Synoptic Gospels (i.e., Matthew, Mark and Luke) but not in John's Gospel. While slightly different in each of the three Gospels, all three relate that a *dove* appeared over Jesus' head and that a *voice* was heard that expressed the very same thing as found in Matthew's Gospel.

The point made by all three Gospels is that there is a direct relationship between God and Jesus and that God's favor rests on Him. Of course, as you might surmise, this became the scriptural basis for the Christian Church understanding God as Three-In-One and, because God called the Human Jesus His Son, that somehow Jesus connects us to God in a very unique way. This is the foundation for our belief that God and humankind are intimately connected. This makes Christianity unique in its conception of the relationship between God and humankind.

Paul's letter to Titus clearly relates that the incarnation of God, in the Person of Jesus, radically transforms our understanding of human life, capitalizing on this idea that the God-Man, Jesus, revealed the truly unique relationship that exists between God and humankind. Paul writes to Titus: *But when the*



kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us; not because of any righteous deeds we had done, but because of His mercy.

I don't know about you, but when I read or hear such statements, I'm overwhelmed by their meaning. To think that I am connected to the Creator in such a manner tells me that I am loved. Feeling this love, I desire to truly become all that God dreamed me to be - to truly become His child by trying to live as Jesus lived. Jesus, the man, is truly the type of human God envisioned when He created us.

Understanding Our Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

As I have shared over the years, in the Eastern Church the feast of the Theophany, except for the feasts of the Pasch (Easter) and the Descent of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost), is one of the oldest festivals. It is the first that was created by the Church since both Easter and Pentecost were feasts that mirrored Jewish feasts.

Theophany was first celebrated at the end of the second or at the start of the third century. Clement of Alexandria (+215) mentions it in his works. The Apostolic Constitutions, a work of the fourth century, speak of this festival thus: *Let them celebrate the feast of the Theophany, for on that day Christ's divinity was revealed, which was confirmed by the Father at his baptism, and by the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove pointing to Christ.* In the third century, Hippolytus of Rome (+235) and Gregory the Wonderworker of Neocaesarea (+270) mention it in the church services; and in the fourth century Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Augustine and other Fathers of the Church preached on this festival.

The feast of Theophany later spread from the East to the West. The Calendar of Philocalus of the year 354 did not as yet have the feast of the Theophany. In 361 it is already celebrated in Gaul (modern France); in 383 in Northern Italy, then in Spain, in the time of Augustine in Northern



Africa and about the year 400 in Rome.

Regarding the history of the celebration of the feast of Theophany in the East, three distinct periods can be gleaned. In the first period, throughout the third century, the feast included the Lord's Nativity and Baptism, as well as the homage of the Wise Men and the miracle in Cana of Galilee. In the second period, during the fourth century, among these events the Nativity held first place. During the third period, toward the end of the fourth century, the feast of the Nativity and the homage of the Wise Men became separated from the feast of Theophany and were transferred to the 25th of December. January 6th became the day on which only the Baptism of Christ was commemorated. The feast of the Theophany, during the reign of Theodosius the Younger (+450), became a state holiday.

All these feasts "MANIFEST" God's presence in the Person of Jesus.

The Divine Liturgy and Our Worship of God

As you might expect, our celebration of the great feast of Theophany is filled with special prayers. Every, possible moveable prayer in the Divine Liturgy is special. The Troparion and Kontakion present the theology of the feast. We pray this tropar:

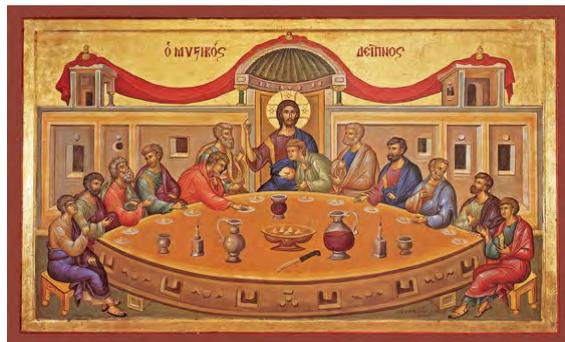
At Your baptism in the Jordan, O Lord, worship of the Trinity was revealed, for the Father's voice bore witness to You, calling You His "beloved Son", and the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the truth of these words. O Christ God, Who appeared and enlightened the world, glory be to You.

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.

These two prayers are truly beautiful expressions of our faith. They declare that we believe the Jesus was and is truly God Incarnate with all the ramifications of that godly act. As we pray them, we are called to express from the depths of our souls and minds our belief in Jesus as God Himself in human form.

During the Liturgy for Theophany we also since the prayer that is used when we initiate a person into



the Church. This prayer reminds us what it means to be a member of the Church. We sing: *All you who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.* As we sing this we are called to stop and think about how we live. Have we truly "PUT ON CHRIST" - this of course means that we have freely and voluntarily chosen to make every attempt to live like Christ, freely responding to the challenges of our lives in the same positive way that Jesus did. It also means that we freely chose to unconditionally love others, not basing our response to the actions on others in any other way than the Jesus Way - unconditional love.

There is another prayer that I would highlight. As the Gospel book is carried into the altar area, we sing: *Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. God the Lord has revealed Himself to us.*

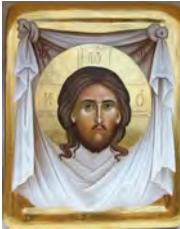
Do we truly believe that God has revealed Himself to us through the Person of Jesus?



St. Michael's Parish News

A Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in Dearborn Michigan

PRE-GREAT FAST SEQUENCE



Next week we already begin the five-week sequence that prepares us for the Great Fast of 2018. The Great Fast begins on February 12th.

Len, our parish's deacon candidate, will give a reflection on January 28th at the end of the Liturgy.

2018 CALENDARS

As some have already discovered, our 2018 Parish Calendars are available in the vestibule.

CONTRIBUTION REPORTS

Please give us until the end of January to prepare your Individual Contribution Report and the Parish Financial Statement. If you would like to make a 2017 contribution, we will receive them until January 21st.

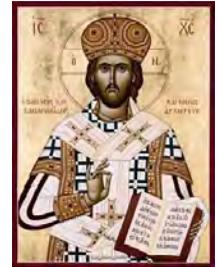
ADULT EDUCATION

Ideas for our Adult Education classes during the Great Fast? Please let us know so we can prepare.

The only person you should try to be better than is the person you were yesterday

CALLED TO HOLINESS

As I tried to suggest in the last issue of this little article, the call to holiness is, in effect, a call to live in the present moment - to forget about the past and not spend time thinking about the future. If we live in the past or the future, we miss the present moment and we miss an encounter with God.



When we live in the NOW we have the opportunity to encounter God as He presents Himself to us. We cannot encounter Him in the past or the future as we experience the past and future since the past and the future are not real and become distorted because of our many desires and fantasies.

So we must ask ourselves at any one moment in the present time, *Who is God to me? How do I know Him?*

We find God at the present moment in every heartbeat within us and every breath that we experience (*or course the problem seems to be is that we become unaware of our heartbeats and breath - we just take them for granted*). We also experience God in the beauty of our world.

(Continued on page 8)

The Story of Christmas in the New Testament

This continues information on the feast of Christmas. Most people, when they think of the Christmas story, think of one biblical narrative that includes the holy family, the midnight hour, a barn, various farm animals, shepherds, angels, wise men and a quiet, little town called Bethlehem. It might come as a big surprise to learn that many of the elements people often treasure as part of the nativity story come from Christmas carols and that the true source for this event, the Gospels in the New Testament, deal with the story of the birth of Jesus in four very different, but yet not contradictory, ways.

Each of the Gospels approaches this story with great care to communicate their respective images of Jesus and in doing so powerfully communicate their unique message to their own particular audience.

The Gospel of Mark is possibly the first of the Gospels to be written and although done so by Mark, according to early Church tradition, probably represents the preaching and message of the Apostle Peter. Mark's Gospel records nothing about the birth of Jesus. Mark starts his story of Jesus with the calling of John the Baptist in

the wilderness. The first time we see Jesus in this Gospel is when Jesus comes to be baptized by John.

This "narrative of omission" serves the unique purpose of Mark's Gospel. Mark wrote his gospel to the Romans of his day and emphasizes the paradoxical message of the hidden service of Jesus as Lord. Together with the secrecy motives in this Gospel, the omission of any details of the birth of Jesus helps the reader to understand that it is not important where a servant is born or from which family he comes – it is his service that defines him.

For the Roman society in the First Century, deeply divided into social classes of honor and status, this exquisite picture of hidden and radical service by one with all authority (Lord) calls the audience of this Gospel to emulate the example of Jesus that as Lord defined his mission and ministry by His service to others.

In the next installment of this article, I'll address how Matthew shares this information. The real differences we find in the Gospels IN NO WAY lessens our belief in Jesus Christ and that He was, and is, God Incarnate.

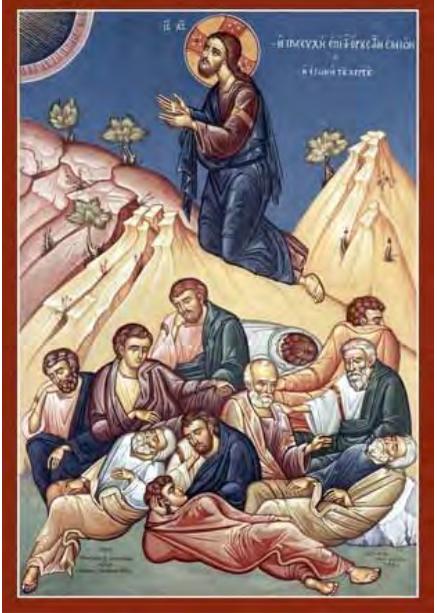
(To be continued)



The Courage to Pray

As I suggested in the last entry in this article, prayer must also be considered an “encounter” with God. We should, however, try and analyze this encounter carefully, because if we do not know the laws it follows we may let it slip away. It is always a mutual encounter. It is always a discovery not only of the other but of ourselves. It is always a relationship. Perhaps the best image for it is a stained glass window. The light shining through it shows up its design, its colors, its beauty and its meaning. But at the same time the window itself by its design, colors, beauty and meaning reveals for us the invisible light beyond it. Thus the window and the light are discovered in relationship to one another. Discovering God in his serene eternity and in the man of sorrows who was the incarnate word, is also a discovery of the greatness of man. When we discover the depths in man, we go beyond the front he presents to us and discover his destiny which is not individual but personal. This destiny makes him more than an example of humankind; it makes him the member of a mysterious body, the whole of mankind, which is where God’s presence is.

As I have shared in the past several weeks through my sermons, understanding that we have always been in the consciousness of God, that is for all eternity, truly changes our understanding of ourselves and begins to give us a true picture of God. In a manner which is beyond our human comprehension, all creation is sustained in the consciousness of God for all eternity. All things are sustained because they are simultaneously in God’s consciousness, to use a human concept. He is the source of all things and sustains all things in existence.



God’s creation is, in a way beyond our comprehension, kept in existence because He wills it to be. Further, we must realize that He freely wills all things into being. This is why He has given humans a free will, so that we may be in His image.

However, at the start any man seeking this encounter is alone and must learn to recognize the existence of the other. This recognition must take place in a relationship and not in isolation. In order to have a relationship, however, we have to “desire” to have the relationship.

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday January 7 – Feast of Theophany
10:00 AM + Special Intention

WEEK AFTER THEOPHANY - TONE 7

Monday, January 8 – George, Dominica & Emilian, Venerables
No Service Scheduled

Tuesday, January 9 – Polyeuct, Martyr
No Service Scheduled

Wednesday January 10 - Gregory of Nyssa, Bishop
No Service Scheduled

Thursday January 11 - Theodosius, Venerable
No Service Scheduled

Friday January 12 – Tatiana, Martyr
8:00 AM - Special Intention

Saturday January 13 - Hermolaus & Stratonicus, Martyrs
No Service Scheduled

Sunday January 14 – Weekend of Zacchaeus - Tone 7
10:00 AM + Special Intention

(Continued from page 5 - Call to Holiness)

We encounter God is the strength of the wind and, during winter, in the cold of the days and the whiteness of snow. They all remind us of His power and the complex system of nature. It is the snow of winter that brings about the renewal of life in the spring, the melting snow bring nutrients to the plants.

When we truly encounter creation, we come to understand how absolutely marvelous it really is and how integral all the systems of nature are to the existence of creation. Creation itself exclaims the power and glory of God and, when you add humanity to creation, you truly see the glory of God.

This requires, however, that we take time, as they say, “to smell the roses” - to truly encounter creation and marvel in its wonder. *What does this mean to you?*



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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>
[Facebook.com/stmichaelugccdbn](https://www.facebook.com/stmichaelugccdbn)

Gaining a Deeper Understanding of the New Testament

In the last issue of the article I began sharing a short summary of the early apostolic preaching as it is found in the 10th Chapter of Acts. I shared five different portions of the outline: (1) the Gospel is open to all; (2) But is first sent to Israel; (3) Salvation History and John the Baptizer; (4) Judea Jerusalem and (5) Passion and Resurrection. There are still two other portions:

Apostolic Mission

Verse 42: Jesus indeed commissioned the apostles to preach first to the people and to bear witness that he is the one set apart by God as judge of the living and the dead.

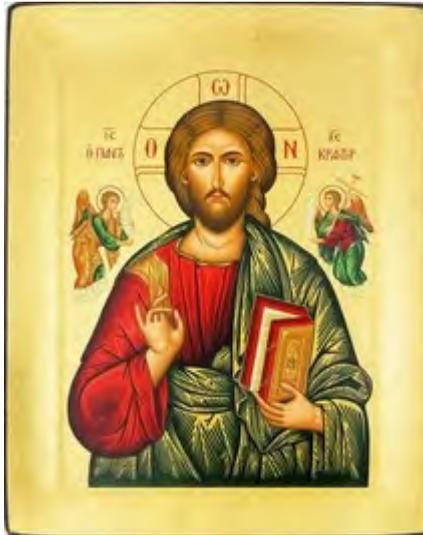
Use of the Old Testament

Verse 43: To him all the prophets testify, saying that everyone who believes in him has forgiveness of sins through his name.

Since assertion is better aided by argument, apostolic testimony was enriched by appeal to the Scriptures, particularly to answer the thorny question of how a Messiah could be truly God's elect and yet be crucified. It was natural to appeal to the holy writings, since all parties in Judaism at the time approached the scriptures to find in them the manifest will of God for the present moment. Peter and the

church around him declared that whatever had happened to Jesus had its adequate explanation in the plan of God which lay hidden in the scriptures but which could now be seen.

Opponents of Jesus would argue from Deuteronomy (21:22-23), "If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his a corpse hung on a tree, it shall not remain on the tree overnight. You shall bury it the same day; otherwise, since God's curse rests on him who hangs on the tree, you will defile the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you as an inheritance." How, then could this Jesus who was executed as a



messianic pretender be the Christ of God? The holy Law itself held him accursed by God. Paul turned this text around to give it a positive meaning. Jesus was innocent, but he had died on our behalf. Paul wrote, "Christ has delivered us from the power of the law's curse by himself becoming a curse for us, as it is written: 'Accursed is anyone who is hanged on a tree'" (Galatians 3:13).

The early preaching of the Church had to take into account the writings of the Old Testament.

Learning our Faith from the Greek Fathers of the Church

I have been sharing information about the Church's struggle to discover a true way to express who Jesus is - that He is God and man. Nestorius (*who the Church eventually declared as a heretic*) hesitated to use the word *Theotokos* to describe Mary, the mother of Jesus. (*It should be noted that many, if not most Protestant churches also refuse to use this name for Mary*). Why? *Theotokos* (*God-bearing one*) seemed to Nestorius to threaten the reality of Christ's humanity. Nestorius was willing to say that the Christ born of Mary is God, but did not want to say, "God is born," because to do so implied in his mind that the One born was not a true man."

Instead, Nestorius preferred to describe Mary as *Christokos* because Christ bearer appeared to him faithfully to preserve the reality of both Christ's deity and humanity. If *Christotokos* proved unsatisfactory, Nestorius proposed, what about complementing *theotokos* with *anthropotokos* (*man-bearing one*)? Mary after all, had given birth to more than God.

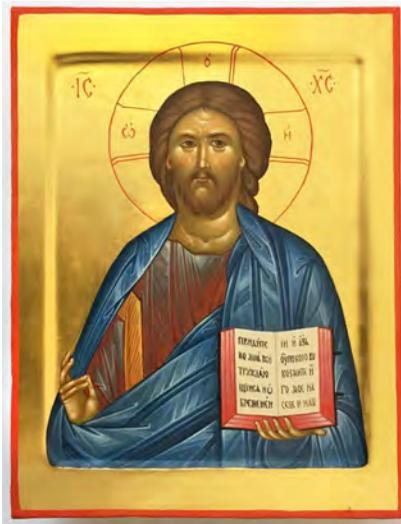
Indeed, such a proposal was unsatisfactory to Cyril and other

fathers centered in Alexandria. Cyril maintains that to call Mary both "God-bearer" and "man-bearer" was deficient because "she was not the mother merely of God, or merely of a man, but the Mother of Christ, and Christ was not merely God, and not merely man, but was God conjoined to man, or if one liked, man conjoined to God.

But was Cyril's thinking at this juncture significantly different from that of Nestorius? Did not Nestorius favor the designation *Christotokos* to describe the mother of Jesus? A closer look at Cyril's response to Nestorius is necessary to answer this question.

Many non-Catholic and non-Orthodox Christians refuse to use the term *Theotokos* or Mother of God because they argue that a human cannot be the "mother" of God since He is without beginning. The older Christian position is that Mary could not be the mother of just one nature of Jesus since that would destroy the unity of the two natures of Christ.

Our religious beliefs, as you can see, are complex. The belief in Jesus as the God-Man and the Trinity as Three-Persons-In-One, are very, very complex concepts.





THE EASTERN HERALD

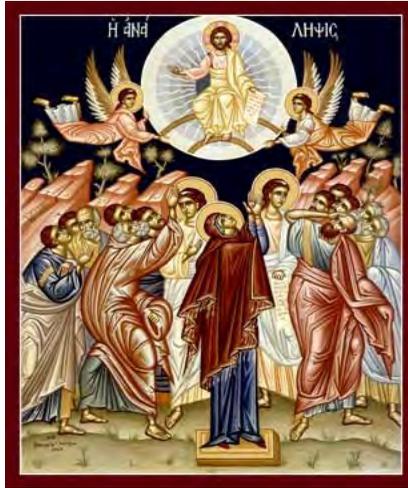
СХІДНЬЙ ВІСНИК

The Weekly Newsletter of Very Reverend Canon Wayne J. Ruchgy, Ph.D.
Vol 64 No 1 Weekend Of Theophany January 6-7, 200-18

The Spirituality of the Christian East

I have begun sharing thoughts about human spirituality. Everyone is spiritual whether they know it or not. When you consider what it means to be spiritual, you realize that it refers to individuals who are truly waking up to the dimension of their soul or being. When one begins to really feel into the spiritual dimension of their being, they bump into love. They bump into compassion. They bump into beauty. They bump into real peace and real joy. And that begins to be where they live their life from, real, authentic beings that have a tremendous amount of meaning in their life.

Spirituality is the process whereby we truly come to understand who we are in God's creation and we begin to truly see the meaning and the purpose of our lives. It is the process that also helps us to become content with who we are and to realistically



Life's Journey is an Ascension to the Heavenly Father

see where we need to change in order to be more the person that God intended when he created us.

True spirituality helps us to also to discover the joy of life and to find contentment and peace. It helps us to own our own feelings and our responses to others. It helps us to become the masters of our own lives. It puts us

in touch with the God and helps us to unconditionally love others regardless of how they might treat us. It helps us to become "children of God." by also becoming imitators of Jesus, God's only-begotten Son.

Spirituality is not something that we should fear but, rather, something that we should strive to development, knowing that it will make this life much for fulfilling and joyous.

We all must ask ourselves: *Do I really want to become a spiritual person? If not, why not?*

The Voice is John, the Word is Christ

John is the voice, but the Lord is the Word who was in the beginning. John is the voice that lasts for a time; from the beginning Christ is the Word who lives forever.

Do you need proof that the voice passes away but the divine Word remains? Where is John's baptism today? It served its purpose, and it went away. Now it is Christ's baptism that we celebrate. It is in Christ that we all believe; we hope for salvation in Him. This is the message the voice cried out.

Because it is hard to distinguish word from voice, even John himself was thought to be the Christ. The voice was thought to be the word. But the voice acknowledged what it was, anxious not to give offense to the word. I am not the Christ, he said, nor Elijah, nor the prophet. And the question came: Who are you, then? He replied: I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord.

The voice of one crying in the wilderness is the voice of one breaking the silence. Prepare the way

for the Lord, he says, as though he were saying: "I speak out in order to lead him into your hearts, but he does not choose to come where I lead him unless you prepare the way for him."

To prepare the way means to pray well; it means thinking humbly of oneself. We should take our lesson from John the Baptist. He is thought to be the Christ; he declares he is not what they think. He does not take advantage of their mistake to further his own glory.

If he had said, "I am the Christ," you can imagine how readily he would have been believed, since they believed he was the Christ even before he spoke. But he did not say it; he acknowledged what he was. He pointed out clearly who he was; he humbled himself.

He saw where his salvation lay. He understood that he was a lamp, and his fear was that it might be blown out by the wind of pride.

St. Augustine of Hippo

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