



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 205-930-9681 / 205-907-9447

Visit stsymeon.com

✠ **January 10, 2016** ✠

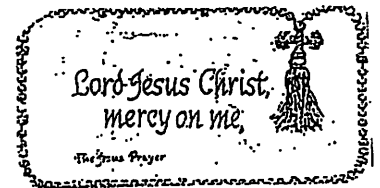
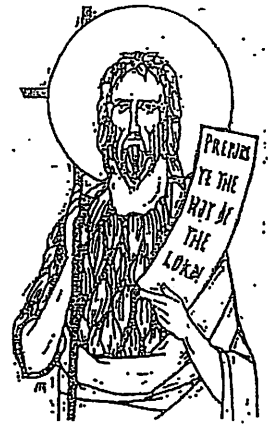
Postfeast of Theophany

St. Gregory of Nyssa (395)

St. Theosebia, sister of Sts. Basil & Gregory

St. Theophan the Recluse,

Bishop of Tambov (1894)



✠ **Note: No Monday Inquirer's Class**

✠ **For Newly Departed Archpriest Demetrius Edwards:**

Visitation tonight – St. Gregory's, Tuscaloosa, 5:00pm – 7:00pm with Memorial Service at 7:00pm.

Tomorrow, Funeral of a Priest – 10:00am, St. Gregory's Burial at St. Nicholas Church Cemetery, Brookside, AL

➤ **House Blessings are on! See Father to schedule this blessed event!**

The Holy Trinity

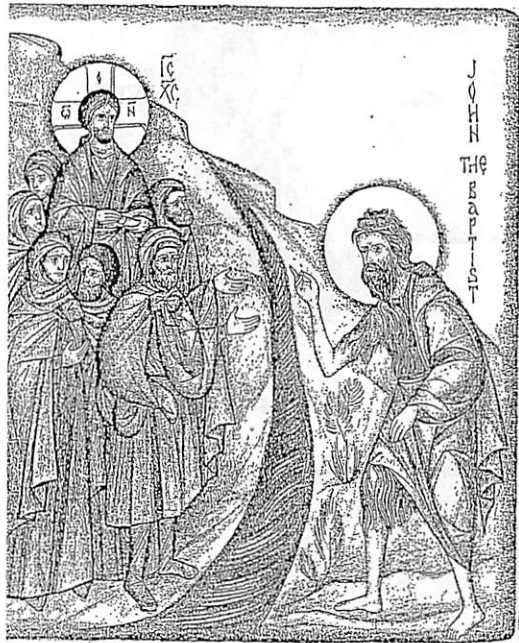
✠ "The divine Logos, when He became man, said, 'My Father is working even now, and I am working' (Jn. 5:17). The Father approves this work, the Son properly carries it out, and the Holy Spirit essentially completes both the Father's approval of it all and the Son's execution of it, in order that the God in Trinity might be 'through all and in all things' (Eph. 4:6), contemplated as the whole reality proportionately in each individual creature as it is deemed worthy by grace, and in the universe altogether, just as the soul naturally indwells both the whole of the body and each individual part without diminishing itself." St. Maximos the Confessor (7th C)

What can be Impossible to Him?

✠ If God Himself has become human flesh and soul without ceasing to be God; if He has done that which would be impossible for us to do, then, after this, what can be impossible to Him? What is more infinite than this wonder? Thus has our God indeed shown and shows His omnipotence... What unbelieving person will, after this, doubt the possibility of the transformation, for instance, of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ during the Divine Liturgy? This is but an ordinary act of the God of wonders, after the fact of His having created flesh for Himself from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. St. John of Kronstadt

By His Own Blood

✠ "Vain in every respect are they who despise the entire dispensation of God, and disallow the salvation of the flesh, and treat with contempt its regeneration, maintaining that it is not capable of incorruption. But if this flesh indeed does not attain salvation, then neither did the Lord redeem us with His Blood, nor is the Cup of the Eucharist the Communion of His Blood, nor the Bread which we break the Communion of His Body (cf. I Cor. 10:16). For blood can only come from veins and flesh, and whatsoever else makes up the substance of man, such as the Word of God was actually made. By His own Blood He redeemed us... And as we are members of Him, we are also nourished by means of the creation... He has acknowledged the Cup (which is a part of creation) as His own Blood, from which He bedews our blood; and the Bread (also a part of creation) He has established as His own Body, from which He gives increase to our bodies." St. Irenaeus of Lyons (150)



THE BLESSING OF HOMES



It is the custom among many Orthodox Christians to have their homes blessed with holy water sanctified on Theophany (the feast which commemorates the Baptism of the Lord in the Jordan River). All the faithful are encouraged to observe this custom.

The Purpose

The annual blessing of homes is a custom of special beauty and significance. We again ask Christ to bless and enter our homes and lives, as we desire to be with Him. We ask that by the sprinkling of blessed water, the Holy Spirit renew us, our families and our lives in our homes. As Christ brought salvation to the house of Zacchaeus; we ask for the same for all dwelling in our homes.

The Order

The house being cleaned and ready, we dress in an honorable manner (as we would for church). When the priest arrives, we greet him at the door, having turned off any radio, tv or other noise based element. Animals that may cause disruption should be placed in a secure place. On a table upon which icons are placed or before the icon corner in the main room, a small but wide-mouthed bowl of newly-blessed water is placed. A list of names (Christian names) of those residing in the house is printed and placed on the table along with a lighted candle and censor (if you have one). These items are arranged and ready prior to the arrival of the priest. At the beginning of the service for the blessing of the home, a family member leads the priest throughout the house with a lighted candle. The rest of the household follows and then returns to the table for the final prayer and blessing with water upon those present.

Wisdom from the Desert

When the holy Abba Anthony lived in the desert he was beset by accidie (spiritual listlessness, boredom), and attacked by many sinful thoughts. He said to God, 'Lord, I want to be saved but these thoughts do not leave me alone; what shall I do in my affliction? How can I be saved?' A short while afterwards, when he got up to go out, Anthony saw a man like himself sitting at his work, getting up from his work to pray, then sitting down and plaiting a rope, then getting up again to pray. It was an angel of the Lord sent to correct and reassure him. He heard the angel saying to him, 'Do this and you will be saved.' At these words, Anthony was filled with joy and courage. He did this, and he was saved.

Saint Theophan the Recluse on the Theophany

In celebrating Theophany, let us be transferred in thought to the very location of the event and let us attend mentally to what happened there. There is Betharaba. You see Saint John on the shore in garments made of camel skin, with a leather belt tied about his loins. An innumerable multitude of people from Jerusalem, Judea and all the country of the Jordan surround him. The baptism of the Saviour has just finished and the eyes of all are turned to the Son of man coming up out of the water. They see nothing else. But sharpen the eye of your mind with faith, and following after John and passing by what is seen by all, direct your attentive vision to what is not seen by all--to the opened heaven, the dove descending, and the audible voice: *This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!* Direct your gaze and do not take your attention from this wondrous sight. O who will give our words the power to worthily hymn the glory of God Who has appeared in the Jordan in Three Hypostases!

Together with lost Paradise, the heavens were sealed by God's justice. But as a strong barrier does not hold back a great pressure of water, so the fortress of righteousness finally broke from the fire of God's love--*and behold, the heavens were opened!* We also open all the powers of our nature and insatiably we shall receive the revealed God and take delight in Him. We satisfy all our feelings, all our thoughts and desires.

We are buried in darkness: but here is abundant light! We are wounded by the joyless separation--both from heaven and from ourselves; but here is the all-enlivening reconciliation. We are weakened by infirmity, but here is the inexhaustible source of every power.

So then--just as after the long darkness of night every creature hungers for light and with eagerness strives to catch the first rays of the rising sun, so we, directing the eye of our mind, enlightened by faith, to the Theophany, eagerly receive the joyous rays of the Divine dispensation of our salvation, released by the merciful word of God the Father--and let us take delight in them!

As the creation compressed by the cold of winter eagerly meets spring which breaks the bonds of cold and receives once again the ordered rejuvenation, likewise we also, with a heart enlivened by the hope of salvation, receive the reconciliation shining in the baptized Lord--let us take delight in Him!

As during the heat of summer the thirsty earth drinks with every mouth the rain falling from heaven, so we also with every desire of the soul receive each power ready to be poured out on us from the Spirit, descending in the form of a dove--and let us delight in them!

But why do we invite ourselves to this? For are we not already led to the entire economy of salvation? Therefore, should we not all be enlightened, reconciled, and enlivened? O that this would someday be true! At one time, referring to John the Baptist, the Lord spoke to the Jews with reproach: *He was a burning and shining lamp, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.* Every year, in His Holy Church, the Lord directs the light of His Theophany at the Jordan with John also upon us. Does he not say to us through this: Here is the burning and shining light! See to it that ye be not willing to rejoice in his light only for a while!

See then that ye walk circumspectly. Do not the deceptive shouts of the enemies of our salvation sometimes seductively strike our ear? False wisdom proclaims: come unto me, I have light. Yet it has no light but only a phantom of light. The world says: Come unto me, I will give you peace. Yet it has no peace, but a phantasy of peace. The prince of the world promises liberty, life and power, yet he has only a phantasy of these.

Hasten to acquire the habit of distinguishing all this and in the light of the Theophany do not be deceived by what is merely called light, and peace, and power, but is not; rather strive towards Him Who is the way, the truth, and life, righteousness, and sanctification and deliverance. He that has tasted of the gifts for the sake of which the Church rejoices, that one rejoices. But whoever has not tasted, first taste and you will rejoice.

On Baptisms Outside the Church by St. Cyprian of Carthage (250 A.D.)

For certain no one can be baptized abroad outside the Church, since there is one Baptism appointed in the holy Church. Furthermore, one is not born by the imposition of hands when he received the Holy Spirit, but in Baptism, that so, already being born, he may receive the Holy Spirit, even it happened in the first Adam. For the Spirit cannot be received, unless he who receives should first have an existence. As the birth of Christians is Baptism, while the generation and sanctification of Baptism are with the Spouse of Christ alone (the Church), who is able to spiritually conceive and bear sons to God, where and of whom and to whom is he born, who is not a son of the Church, so that he should have God as his Father before he has had the Church for his mother? There is no Baptism where the Holy Spirit is not, because there cannot be Baptism without the Spirit.

But if, according to a perverted faith, one could be baptized outside and obtain remission of sins, according to the same faith, he could also attain the Holy Spirit; and there is no need that hands should be laid on him when he comes, that he might obtain the Holy Spirit and be sealed. Either he could obtain both privileges without (outside the Church) by his faith, or he who has been outside has received neither.

There are many heresies which use the words only, but not in a right sense...nor with a sound faith, and in consequence the water (of baptism) which they administer is unprofitable, as deficient in piety, so that who is sprinkled by them is rather polluted by the irreligious than redeemed.

St. Athanasius the Great (325)

The baptism of unbelievers does not heal, does not cleanse, but pollutes.

St. Ambrose of Milan (4th C)

Indifferent to the Matter of Pleasing God

St. Theophan the Recluse

Do not live in a careless manner. A majority of Christians are lukewarm. They seemingly have nothing against God, but they also have no deliberate intention of pleasing God. For example, they drop into church; they drop in, they leave, they make no apology. When they pray at home they make a bow or two, and that is it. They are satisfied. That is how they are in everything with respect to God.

Such Christians are not obvious egotists, but when it comes to the preservation of their own interests, in order to avoid making any self-sacrifice, they can always find a reason to avoid it. They also are not too blatantly vain, but have no objection to amusing themselves with worldly matters.

People of this sort are rather common. They are indifferent to the matter of pleasing God and salvation; they are neither hot nor cold. According to the Scriptures, God turns away from them and rejects them.

※ The eyes of pigs have a natural conformation which makes them turn towards the ground and they can never look up to heaven; so is the soul of one who lets himself be carried away by pleasure. Once the soul is allowed to slip into the slough of enjoyment, she can no longer get out again.

Apophthegmata Patrum

The Proof of the Providence of God through Creation

St. John Chrysostom

“As I have said, for those who are right-minded, God’s declarations will suffice. But since some people are worldly, hard to direct, self-willed, and utterly carnal, come, let us make known God’s providence through His works themselves — as much as we are able to do so. For it is not easy to present all of it, or rather, even the smallest part of it. Infinite and beyond words, it shines through little things and big things, things visible and things invisible. But to begin with, we will make our exposition from visible things.

“God made the wondrous and altogether harmonious creation for no one else but you. So beautiful and so vast, diverse, sumptuous, sufficient, useful and in every way profitable, being sustenance and support for the body, wisdom for the soul, and a suitable path to the knowledge of God — He made it for you.”

“The angels did not need the creation. How could they, when they existed before it came to be? As a testimony that the angels are much older than the creation, listen to what God says when He is conversing with Job: **“When the stars were made, all My angels praised Me and sang of Me with a loud voice”** [Job 38:7]; that is, there were amazed at the multitude of the stars, the beauty, the arrangement, the usefulness, the diversity, the brightness, the brilliance, the harmony and everything else, which they perceive more precisely than we do.”

“And the star, resting aloft, as if it were near and close at hand, leads with precision the man sitting at so great a distance and brings him to a safe harbor without uttering a word. It shows sailors the way by sight and allows them to cut through the sea with assurance, indicating favorable times, so that at times they keep the ship in the harbor and at times they take it into the open sea with confidence, so that they do not, on account of uncertainty of the future, unexpectedly fall upon a stormy day and endure shipwreck.”

“Not only do the stars perfectly delineate the years’ duration and the seasons, but they also indicate - with great accuracy - the hour and the passage of time each night. They allow those, who observe, to know: when the greater part of the night has passed; when the smaller part of it remains, and vice versa — which is useful not only for sailors but also for travelers, so that they neither depart at an unfavorable hour of the night nor stay home at a time suitable for departure.” - St. John Chrysostom

“From the diversity of the stars, those who observe them receive no little enjoyment and profit: the benefit of the seasons, of the hours, of measurement, of magnitude, of smallness, and of a variety beyond words. One can see some smaller stars and some larger and brighter, and some of them appear at different times. Everywhere a great variety is produced by the superabundance of inventive Wisdom. While showing forth a proof of His own wonderworking power, at the same time He provides for the needs of the observers; and grants them great and inexpressible assistance - and along with all this - enjoyment.”

“For what is more delightful than the sky? First, it is like fine linen stretched out above one’s head — clear and transparent. And then it is like a meadow adorned with many flowers, displaying its crown...What is more pleasant than when the night has withdrawn and before the appearance of the rays of the sun, when the reddened sky adorns itself - as with a saffron veil - with the prelude to the rising of the sun? What sight could be more beautiful than the appearance of the sun just after dawn, when - in a short moment of time - it illumines with its rays every land, every sea, every mountain, the valleys and the hills, and the whole sky — stripping off from things visible the vesture of the night and displaying them naked before our eyes?”

“How could one not be struck with admiration at the sun’s course, its orderly movement, its invariable and unhindered service to so many yearly cycles, its continually blossoming beauty, its brilliance of light, its splendor, its purity, which comes into contact with so many bodies but is not at all defiled? And, in addition, at its indescribable usefulness for seeds, for plants, for men, for beasts, for fish, for mists, for stones, for grass, for the earth, the seam and the air — in a word, for all things visible? Everything needs the sun and benefits from its operations and becomes more fit by partaking of it, not only animals and plants but also waters and marshes and springs and rivers and the very nature of the air, which becomes rarefied and purified and more transparent.”

“If I did not consider my discourse to be already exceedingly long and beyond measure, I would also speak a great deal about death. I would bring to light about all the wisdom and providence of God, and I would say many things about corruption, about putrefaction, and worms and about ashes - in the face of which most people wail and bitterly lament, seeing that our bodies will dissolve into ashes, into dust, into worms - and then I would show God’s unspeakable providence and solicitude. For by the same providence, by the same goodness by which God created that which had not existed, He also ordained death and commanded that we have such an end. Even though the things that come to pass are different, they have a common source in God’s goodness.”

“When a man sees someone now dissolved into worms and putrefaction and ashes and dust, who yesterday and the day before was walking along with him, even if he has the mad pride of the devil, he cowers with fear — he is sobered, he restrains himself, he learns to exercise himself in virtue; and he establishes in his mind, the mother of all good things: humility. And neither is he that passes away harmed in any way by it (i.e., by the fact that his body is decaying and has become food for worms.), for he will receive that unfading, incorruptible body; and he that is still in the area (of this temporal life) derives the greatest benefit from that which does not harm the other. Death was introduced into our life as an exceptional teacher of virtue: it moderates one’s thinking, bridles the passions of the soul, calms the waves, and produces stillness.”

“Therefore, knowing what has been said, as well as from many others things, that the providence of God shines forth more plainly than the light of this world, do not waste your efforts on what is superfluous, and do not pursue that which is unattainable, scrutinizing the cause of everything. For even existence itself has been granted to us out of His goodness, since He has no need for our service. And we must honor and worship Him, not only because He made us, or because He bestowed upon us an incorporeal and rational soul, or because He made us superior to all the other creatures, or because He entrusted us with dominion over all that is seen and conferred upon us the scepter — but because He has no need of us. The marvel of His goodness is that He brought us into existence without having any need of service from us. For, in truth, before we and the angels and the powers above came into being, He existed and possessed His own glory and blessedness; and it is only out of love for mankind that He brought us into existence and did all these things for us, and many more as well.”

✘ **“Could the leaves exist without the tree, and could the tree itself exist without earth, air, water and warmth? Likewise no soul can exist without God, without His Son, without His Spirit. God is my being, my breath, my light, my strength, my drink, my food. He carries me as a mother carries her infant in her arms. More than this. Carrying me, my soul and body, He dwells in me and is united to me.”**

~ St. John Kronstadt

This and That

The Fathers and our contemporaries even a few decades ago lived in an era where there was a greater consensus about sexual morality and far less overt and widespread advocacy of immoral sexual behavior and attitudes. We live in a time of unprecedented moral confusion and totally pervasive, strident, and aggressive sexual temptation. We need to confront that in the individual penitent, while also recognizing and acknowledging that his or her sexual passion often reflects the culture's effect on their soul and mind, and perhaps not their true entrapment by sin.

– a priest of the Church

In other cultures, old people are esteemed and valued, and you see them around. In this manic, death-denying culture we live in, there seems to be little place for a melancholic outlook from someone that doesn't look "young!" and "great!" but might know something about life that we don't.

Valery Hazanov

The patchwork of anti-bigamy and anti-polygamy laws—almost all of which originated in a concerted war against Mormonism—is almost certain to come into focus as the debate over nontraditional families moves beyond single-sex couples... In fact, the discriminatory attacks suddenly being faced by Christian bakers and photographers are forcing America's practicing Christians to confront an uncomfortable and unfamiliar reality: they are now but one more of America's many minority groups—and a rather unpopular one at that.

~ Bruce Abramson

In the feudal era there were the "three estates" — the clergy, the nobility and the commons. The first and second were eradicated in Robespierre's (French) Revolution. But in the 18th and 19th century, Edmund Burke and Thomas Carlyle identified what the latter called a "stupendous Fourth Estate."

Wrote William Thackeray: "Of the Corporation of the Goosequill — of the Press ... of the fourth estate. ... There she is — the great engine — she never sleeps. She has her ambassadors in every quarter of the world — her courtiers upon every road. Her officers march along with armies, and her envoys walk into statesmen's cabinets."

The fourth estate, the press, the disciples of Voltaire, had replaced the clergy it had dethroned as the new arbiters of morality and rectitude. Today the press decides what words are permissible and what thoughts are acceptable. The press conducts the inquisitions where heretics are blacklisted and excommunicated from the company of decent men, while others are forgiven if they recant their heresies.

... In some countries of the Muslim world, Americans who embrace "Hollywood values" regarding abortion, adultery and homosexuality, can get their heads chopped off as quickly as converts to Christianity.

... In what Muslim countries does Earl Warren's interpretation of the First Amendment — about any and all religious presence being banned in public schools and all religions being treated equally — apply?

- Patrick Buchanan

A nation without a replacement birth rate is not viable. If you don't want to be taken over by someone else, have kids (unless you have received monastic tonsure, have otherwise chosen celibacy, have some medical issue, etc). Birth control and abortion are bringing death not only to individuals, but our entire civilization. And for what? So people can have careers unhindered by children? For the useless mass produced junk that's the reward of a dual income household? Our society is rotting from the inside, from our own sin and selfishness.

– Internet comment

The long-term prospects for traditional Christians are especially pessimistic, because increasingly, the liberalizing logic of both the Left and the Right requires that they be seen as a threat to the new order.

-Rod Dreher

HOMILY ~ On that which constitutes the Unity of the Faithful ... One Lord, one Faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all. (Eph. 4:5-6)

Here is the all-important and extremely obvious reason for all Christians to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3) and be one body and one spirit (Ephesians 4:4). For the One Lord Jesus Christ is our Creator, Redeemer and Resurrector. There are not two true Christs, that there should be division among us. One and the same blood was shed upon the Cross for us all, just as one and the same mouth prayed for us all in Gethsemane. **We have one Faith in the Holy Trinity, undivided and life-creating-the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one in Essence and three in Persons-the Unbegotten Father, the Begotten Son and the Spirit proceeding from the Father.** We have one Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This Baptism is by threefold immersion in water, for death to sin and the devil, and for the resurrection and life in Christ the Lord. One God and Father of all-the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, Who through Christ and because of Christ adopts us and gives us the right to say to Him, Our Father.

Do you see, my brethren, how strong are the bonds that unite us? Not even the stars themselves are bound by stronger bonds, nor the water to the earth, nor fire to the air. Do you see the overwhelming reasons that we have for unity? Everything else that, from the left hand, would urge us to division is inconsequential compared to these reasons, like a grain of sand compared to the high mountains. The devil cannot destroy our unity if we do not help him. The devil can never conquer us if we do not surrender ourselves to him.

O Lord Jesus, sweet and gracious, how firmly Thou hast bound us for eternal good! Keep us, we pray, in this bond. To Thee be glory and praise forever! Amen. ~ From the Prologue

Through the Holy Spirit

✘ "Christ came for Baptism partly out of obedience towards the One Who sent John. As He Himself said, 'Thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness' (Mt. 3:15). Other reasons were to make Himself known, to make a beginning of guiding us towards salvation, and to confirm to His followers, Who were baptized in accordance with His teaching and commandments, that the Holy Spirit is given in baptism, and that through the Holy Spirit baptism is made a cleansing remedy for the stains sunk deeply into us, because of having been born and living in the passions. Although Christ had no need of cleansing even as man, since He was born of a pure Virgin and lived completely without sin, He was purified for our sake, just as it was for our sake that He deigned to be born."

St. Gregory Palamas

THE BLESSING OF HOMES

✘ One of the central signs of our acceptance of God's sanctification of creation at Holy Theophany is the blessing of our homes. This is done:

To reveal the home as what it is created by God to be, a way to Heaven.

To rid the home of every evil.

To reveal the truth that the family is a small Church unit in Christ.

To consecrate the home and all the activity in it to God.

To fill the home and all those who abide in it with God's grace and blessings.

Only the Church can reveal what life is because She alone is the Kingdom of God on earth. She lives within Christ and reveals Him to us. The home is the little Church, a part of the greater Church, and therein participates in the mystery of God's grace. By the blessing of homes with holy water, the priest sanctifies this smaller unit of the Church, in the same way that the main Church is blessed and sanctified, for just as in the Church building proper, in the home the Church blesses, reveals and sanctifies all things in the very way we live our lives.