



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **January 8, 2012** ✠

30th Sunday after Pentecost

The Sunday after Theophany

St. George the Chozevite (7th C), St. Domnica of Constantinople (395)

St. Elias the Wonderworker of Egypt (4th C), St. Aboun the Perfumer of Baghdad, at Tbilisi, Georgia (786), St. Emilian the Confessor of Cyzicus (820), New Hieromartyr Priest Isidore & 72 companions in Estonia, slain by the Latins (1472), St. Paisius of Uglich (1504)

⇒ Today: Children's Play (Life of the Theotokos) & Visit from St. Nicholas

⇒ Sunday, January 22 - Ice Skating Party after Liturgy

⇒ House Blessings are on thru February 19 - see Father for an appointment.

On the Holy Theophany

✠ Whom have we, O Lord, like You? – The Great One Who became small; the Wakeful Who slept; the Pure One Who was baptized; the Living One Who died; The King Who abased Himself to ensure honor for all. Blessed is your honor! It is right that man should acknowledge your divinity. It is right for heavenly beings to worship your humanity. The heavenly beings were amazed to see how small You became, and the earthly ones to see how exalted! **St. Ephraim the Syrian (7th C)**

✠ 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 (14th C)

One More New Year Thought

✠ If you are making something, you must call to mind the Creator of all things. If you see the light, remember the Giver of light. If you put on your clothes, recall whose gift they are and thank Him Who provides for your life. In short, let every action be a cause of your remembering and praising God, and lo, you will be praying without ceasing and therein your soul will always rejoice.

St. Peter of Damascus (7th C)

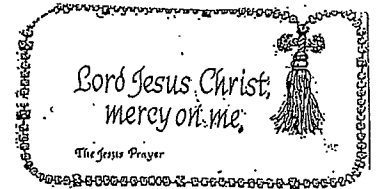
SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD . . .

✠ We were created for eternal life by our Creator, we are called to it by the word of God, and we are renewed by holy Baptism. And Christ the Son of God came into the world for this, that He should call us and take us there, and He is the one thing needful. For this reason, your very first endeavor and care should be to receive it. Without it everything is as nothing, though you have the whole world under you.

• **St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (+1779)**

Christ delivered men from mythology and idols, not negatively by suppressing the image, but positively by revealing the real human face of God.

--Paul Evdokimov



MORE TIME

As we have now entered the New Year, let us commit ourselves in making more time for our families and our Holy Church. Commitment to family is an integral part of Orthodox teaching, defining "who we are and what we care about."

Throughout the Holy Bible we learn of many families and their trials. God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him" (Genesis 1:18). After creating Adam, God took a rib from him and "the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man" (Genesis 2:22). This was the first family as created by God, Adam and Eve. In the Book of Ruth we discover Ruth and Naomi, her mother-in-law, joining together after they are both widowed. Imagine a bride and her mother-in-law together as a family, suffering hardships, supporting each other.

In the Gospel according to Saint Matthew (12:48) we find our Lord extending the definition of family when He points to His disciples and says, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

The Holy Church is a family of those who follow the will of the Father. As a family headed by Christ, we do not follow social trends but ground our lives upon worship and obedience to Almighty God. This implies, of course, that we must make time for family, praying together at meals and in the home. Parents, as Saint John Chrysostom says, are the instructors in the homes, guiding their children in the love of God. We also must come together for communal prayer and worship with the larger family of our Parish week after week. We come together to be nourished by the Holy Eucharist, edified by the Gospel, and supported by the community of the faithful so that we can be armed and able to live, work, and play the remainder of the week. We set aside for God His Day -- the Day of the Lord (Kyriakos).

The Church also designates fasting periods such as the Nativity Fast, Great Lent, the Dormition of the Theotokos and the Apostles' Fast. In her wisdom, the Holy Church gives us these special times to help us re-prioritize our lives. Knowing that we easily fall away from Christ-centeredness through the everyday living of life, the Holy Church teaches us to make God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the family our priorities.

This is an interesting concept - to live life for the joy of God and the salvation of one's soul. If we do this with humility and love, then family will naturally be a major concern and source of great joy.

Compelled by our Conscience

✠ When we are compelled by our conscience to accomplish all the commandments of God, then we shall understand that the Law of the Lord is faultless. It is performed through our good actions, but cannot be perfected by men without God's mercy.

St. Mark the Ascetic

The Good we have neglected...

✠ We shall be judged for the evil we have done, but especially for the good we have neglected and for the fact that we have not loved our neighbor.

St. Maximus the Confessor

On the Eve of the Feast, all draw and carry water to their homes and keep it and preserve it throughout the whole year. The day of sanctifying the waters becomes a clear sign [of God's grace], for the nature of these waters is not spoiled for a long time, but it endures for a whole year, or two, or three, or many years. Today the waters that are drawn remain fresh and new and after an extended time is as on the day in which it was drawn.

HOLY WATER

ON THEOPHANY, that is, the Day of the Lord's Baptism, every year a great miracle is performed. The Holy Spirit, coming down upon the water, changes its natural properties. It becomes incorrupt, that is, it does not spoil, remains transparent and fresh for many years, receives the grace to heal illnesses, to drive away demons and every evil power, to preserve people and their dwellings from every danger, to sanctify various objects whether for church or home use. Therefore Orthodox Christians with reverence drink Holy Water — a great Agiasma (holy thing), as the Greeks call it.

One should always have at home enough Theophany water so that it will last the whole year, and make use of it at every need: in cases of illness, leaving on a journey, whenever one is upset, students when going to examinations. They do well who daily, before eating any kind of food, drink a little Holy Water. It strengthens the powers of our soul — if it is done, of course, with prayer and reverence, and one does not merely expect from it a mechanical result.

Every priest should take care to bless a sufficient quantity of water for his church, so that it will be on hand for the course of the whole year for every need and to be given out to those who ask for it; and parishioners should provide themselves at Theophany with Holy Water for the whole year and even so that it can be kept for future years.

“He took our infirmity”

+ *Archbishop John Maximovitch*

Archbishop John Maximovitch
San Francisco, 1964

Why did Jesus, the Son of God, who came into the world to heal sin by his own sinlessness and to bring human beings into communion with divine life, desire, and indeed demand, to be baptized by John? We know from the gospel that this question was also at the center of John's heart. “I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?” (Mt 3:14). The following is the Church's response.

By accepting baptism, Christ identifies himself with all people, with all sinners without exception. He identifies himself with every sinner in need of forgiveness, salvation and rebirth... He identifies himself with all and with each one of us. In being baptized, He demonstrates that He came not to judge or condemn, not to bring rules and laws from outside, so to speak, from on high, from the heights of his perfection and divinity, but to be united with us, so that in becoming one of us, He might make us partakers of his perfect and sinless life. John the Baptist said of him, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29). Christ entered our world as a child, and in his birth He took upon himself, and made his own, our human nature. The Son of God became

the Son of Man. And He did this not for the righteous, but for sinners, for the lost. He loves them with sacrificial love, He gives himself and his whole life to them. Here, in John's baptism, He, the Sinless One, joins with us sinners; He, the Savior, joins with the lost, for there is no sin which can overcome God's love for us. In being baptized He unites himself with the life of sinful human beings, just as later on, at the end He, the Deathless One, also freely unites himself with human beings in death. All of this testifies that Christ desires to save us through love; and only through love, but love means, above all, union with the one whom you love. As the prophet Isaiah said, “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases...and with his wounds we are healed” (Is 53:4, 5).

-Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

8 January

Holy Martyr Aboun of Baghdad

(+786)

Aboun lived in the Arab city of Baghdad, which is south of ancient Babylon. As a young teenager, he began to learn the trade of making salves, ointments and perfumes.

When Aboun was seventeen years old, the prince of Georgia came to Baghdad. In those days, the Arabs had conquered part of Georgia, and the princes of those areas had to visit the Arab King often to show their obedience to him. Aboun met some of the Georgians, and he became interested in going to their country. When the Georgian prince, Nerses, was released by the king, Aboun begged him to take him to Georgia with him. Prince Nerses agreed.

The prince and Aboun became good friends and, when they came to Georgia, Prince Nerses asked Aboun to live with his family. Aboun soon learned the Georgian language, and began to read the Holy Gospel and religious books in Prince Nerses' library. After some time, he came to believe firmly in the Orthodox faith and wanted to be baptized. But the Arabs had a law forbidding any Arab to leave the pagan religion called "Mohammedanism" and follow Christ. So, Aboun was afraid to be baptized, because the Arab governor would have him killed.

In the year 780, the Arab king became angry with Prince Nerses, and the prince and his family had to flee and hide in a country north of Georgia. Since they were now outside the Arab lands, Aboun was baptized. He began to live like a true monk, praying and fasting in order to grow in strength.

Prince Nerses was able to go back to Georgia in a few years, and Saint Aboun went with him. He refused to hide the fact that he was a Christian. Some of his friends told him, "You can pray and receive Communion secretly, so that the Arabs will not know that you follow Christ, and they will not kill you."

St Aboun replied, "I will not be ashamed of Christ in front of the unbelievers. If I deny Christ before men, He will deny me before the Father on judgment day."

Aboun went about the streets boldly. He began to teach people about Christ and urge them to be baptized. Soon, the Arabs began to complain to the governor. Aboun's friends begged him to go into hiding somewhere, but he answered: "I will not hide the Gospel from those who are in darkness."

St Aboun was soon arrested and brought to trial before the governor. He was convicted of being a Christian and sentenced to death. He was put into prison to be beaten and tortured for over a week in an effort to make him renounce Christ. Finally, on the feast of Theophany, the saint was taken to the prison yard and his sacred head was cut off.

Through his holy prayers may we find strength not to deny Christ or hide the Holy Gospel before the unbelievers who surround



The Theophany of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ

Celebrated on the 6th Day of the Month January

Theophany is the Feast which reveals the Most Holy Trinity to the world through the Baptism of the Lord (Mt.3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). God the Father spoke from Heaven about the Son, the Son was baptized by the St John the Forerunner, and the Holy Spirit descended upon the Son in the form of a dove. From ancient times this Feast was called the Day of Illumination and the Feast of Lights, since God is Light and has appeared to illumine "those who sat in darkness," and "in the region of the shadow of death" (Mt.4:16), and to save the fallen race of mankind by grace.

In the ancient Church it was the custom to baptize catechumens at the Vespers of Theophany, so that Baptism also is revealed as the spiritual illumination of mankind.

The origin of the Feast of Theophany goes back to Apostolic times, and it is mentioned in The Apostolic Constitutions (Book V:13). From the second century we have the testimony of St Clement of Alexandria concerning the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord, and the night vigil before this Feast.

There is a third century dialogue about the services for Theophany between the holy martyr Hippolytus and St Gregory the Wonderworker. In the following centuries, from the fourth to ninth century, all the great Fathers of the Church: Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan, John of Damascus, commented on the Feast of Theophany.

The monks Joseph the Studite, Theophanes and Byzantios composed much liturgical music for this Feast, which is sung at Orthodox services even today. St John of Damascus said that the Lord was baptized, not because He Himself had need for cleansing, but "to bury human sin by water," to fulfill the Law, to reveal the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and finally, to sanctify "the nature of water" and to offer us the form and example of Baptism.



On the Feast of the Baptism of Christ, the Holy Church proclaims our faith in the most sublime mystery, incomprehensible to human intellect, of one God in three Persons. It teaches us to confess and glorify the Holy Trinity, one in Essence and indivisible.

The Church shows the necessity of Baptism for believers in Christ, and it inspires us with a sense of deep gratitude for the illumination and purification of our sinful nature. The Church teaches that our salvation and cleansing from sin is possible only by the power of the grace of the Holy Spirit, therefore it is necessary to preserve worthily these gifts of the grace of holy Baptism, keeping clean this priceless garb, for "As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27).

On the day of Theophany, all foods are permitted, even if the Feast falls on a Wednesday or Friday.

Translation by Fr. Stephen Janos from the "Reference Book for Clergy-Server"

Troparion - Tone 1

When Thou, O Lord, was baptized in the Jordan the worship of the Trinity was made manifest, for the voice of the Father bore witness to Thee and called Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the truthfulness of His word. O Christ, our God, Who hast revealed Thyself and hast enlightened the world, glory to Thee!

Kontakion - Tone 4

Today Thou hast shown forth to the universe, and Thy light O Lord has shone on us, who with understanding praise Thee. Thou hast come and revealed Thyself, O Light unapproachable.



Concerning the Radiant or Dark Covering of the Soul

— An Instruction by St. Theophan the Recluse (+1894) – Remembered January 10

The soul has a “covering” this is an element in which the soul works on the body and the body on the soul. The “covering” of the soul adopts precisely the appearance which corresponds to its inner attitude. While God knows the inner most part of our souls, the Saints are aware of the general condition of our souls by our “covering.” The Saints do not see directly, but by means of the souls’ covering, which is like their own (spiritual) and like the element in which they live (spiritual) because the state of the soul is accurately reflected by its covering.

Imagine, if you will now, two people are sitting and talking. During this, the soul of each person has its own disposition. Neither one sees what is in the soul of other account of the coarse covering of the body, beneath which the soul is concealed.

The Angels and Saints however, if they were to gaze upon them, would see their souls as they are and what is within them, because the state they are in, and that which is in them, are reflected in their souls’ covering.

If within the soul are holy thoughts and feelings, then its covering is bright; with each holy feeling the brightness has its own character. But if the thoughts and feelings are not quite pure, then the soul’s covering is likewise not bright, and each impure feeling has its own characteristic gloom, which is sometimes like fog, at other times like the gloom of night.

Suppose you were to rise up to Heaven and perceive with angelic vision (after taking on, of course, an angelic body) — then having turned your gaze upon the earth, you would see among the varied masses of people bright shades, semi-bright, hazy and murky. It would not be at all surprising if those who were brightly dressed seemed gloomy to you, if their souls were bad, while those in tatters would seem bright if their souls were pure. This is how the Saints, the angels and our Guardian Angel see us, and judging by what they see, they rejoice or grieve over us.

Besides the Angels and Saints, there are dark angels that are invisible to us and also see. However, when the soul is bright, they are unable to look at it, like bats that fear the light. They look at it only when it begins to darken. They run in packs everywhere, and as soon as they notice a darkened soul, they immediately fall upon it, and begin to twist it to and fro with thoughts, passionate desires and disturbance of feelings. The demons establish themselves in a turbulent way in the realm between the body and soul, here they sit next to the soul and begin to stir it up, like dust by wind. How the spiritual powers see us is in fact how we really are.

He did not abandon our human kind...

✘ Glorify the Lord in thanksgiving, that He did not abandon our human kind, and that He opened for us the wondrous path to salvation and brought it close to us, showing us examples of those who are saved... The angels praised God with loud voices while the path to salvation was only beginning. How much more should we praise God seeing with our own eyes the accomplishment of so many wondrous deeds for our salvation! So sing unto Him unceasingly: Glory to God in the Highest!

He does not know himself...

✘ If a person does not deny sin and run from it, then that is because he does not know himself and the danger he is in for the sake of his sin. If his eyes were opened he would run from sin as he would run from a house engulfed in flames.

St. Theophan the Recluse (1894)

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.

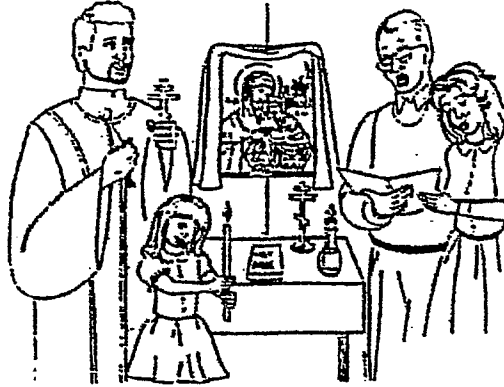
People of this sort are rather common. They are indifferent to the matter of pleasing God and salvation; they are neither hot nor cold. According to the Scriptures, God turns away from them and rejects them.

✘ 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 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.

An Extended Visit

Oftentimes those having their homes blessed wish for a more extended visitation of the priest. This can be arranged by speaking with Father James and securing a particular date