

But the Creator saw that their wound was great and needed care. He who is Himself their Creator and healer, Jesus, thus sent forerunners before Himself. ... Those invested with the Spirit [i.e. prophets] saw that no one among the creatures could heal this great wound, but only the goodness of God, His only-begotten, whom He sent as salvation of the entire world. In His benevolence, and for the salvation of all, the Father of creation did not spare His Only-begotten, but delivered Him up for our sins. He was humbled by our iniquities and by His stripes we were healed. Through the word of His power He gathered us from all lands, from one end of the earth to the other, resurrecting our hearts from the earth and teaching us that we are members of one another.

Saint Anthony the Great,
whom we commemorate on Friday

Sunday 12 January 2014 is the Sunday after the Theophany of the Lord.

Matins Gospel: John 20:1-10

Epistle: Ephesians 4:7-13

Gospel: Matthew 4:12-17

When the women Disciples of the Lord had learnt from the Angel the joyful message of the Resurrection, casting away the ancestral condemnation triumphantly they said to the Apostles: 'Death has been despoiled, Christ God has been raised, granting the world His great mercy.'

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Ephesians 6:10-17; Luke 20:1-8

The Holy Martyrs Hermylus and Stratonikus; Maximus the Righteous

Tuesday: Hebrews 10:32-38; Luke 12:32-40

Apodosis of Epiphany; Holy Fathers Slain at Sinai and Raitho

Wednesday: Galatians 5:22-26; 6:1-2; Luke 12:32-40

John the Hut-Dweller; Paul of Thebes; Gerasimos, Patriarch of Alexandria

Thursday: Acts 12:1-11; John 21:14-25

Veneration of the Chains of Ap. Peter; Righteous Makarios of Kalogeras

Friday: Matthew 11:27-30; Hebrews 13:17-21; Luke 6:17-23

Anthony the Great; Anthony of Berropas; New Martyr George of Ioannina

Saturday: John 10:1-9; Hebrews 13:7-16; Matthew 5:14-19

Athanasios & Cyril, Patriarchs of Alexandria; Zenia the Martyr



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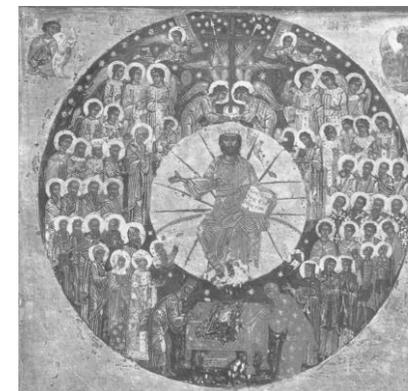
A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

12 January 2014

**Archbishopric of Good Hope
Patriarchate of Alexandria & All Africa**

The Light of the World

Today, on the Sunday after Theophany, we hear how, after His baptism in the River Jordan and the arrest of Saint John the Baptist, Jesus Christ withdrew to Galilee where He began His preaching ministry. Saint Matthew tells us that this was to fulfil the words of the prophet Isaiah who proclaimed that those living in darkness have seen a great light.



The feast of Theophany is a feast of the Light. By coming among us in His Nativity, the light of Jesus Christ has entered into the darkness of our world, and at His Baptism in the Jordan, this light was publicly manifested to all the world. Now we see how this light begins to spread out, first in Galilee, but eventually the Light of Christ will spread, little by little, throughout the whole world.

Like Saint John the Baptist, Jesus called people to repentance, "for the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand." Saint John had preached that the Kingdom was coming, but now, with the coming of Christ, the Kingdom is "at hand," for it is the presence of Jesus Christ that makes the Kingdom present. But it is only beginning and must continue to grow until it exists in all its fullness.

We enter the Kingdom of Heaven through repentance, a repentance that is not a once-off event, but a process that must continue throughout our lives. However, while repentance involves turning away from sin, it is not a gloomy, negative discipline, but rather a joyful turning towards God. For a life of repentance involves choosing that which truly satisfies our deepest longings; and as we align our own wills with the Will of God, we discover true freedom and a joy that nothing can surpass.

The "great light" is Christ our Lord and the brightness of the Gospel preaching.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria

A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

When we confess our faith in the Creed, we unite ourselves with the faith of the Church, and it is this faith that enables us to participate in the Divine Liturgy. Through it, we are able to unite ourselves to the Church's offering of the Holy Gifts on the altar, and prepare to receive Jesus Christ in Holy Communion.

We have seen previously that Christians believe in one God who is a God of love and communion, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, who has united Himself to our humanity in order to save and heal it. Jesus Christ came to restore our relationship with God which had been damaged by the fall of Adam and by the entrance of sin into the world.



In the Creed we confess that Jesus Christ

was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; He rose again on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father...

In order to save us, Christ had to become like us in order to save us from within. Through the fall, death had entered into the world. This was not part of God's original plan for us for God is a God of life, but in turning away from God we had become powerless against death. God cannot die, but by becoming human, Jesus Christ took on our mortal nature which

meant that He too could undergo death. He emptied Himself, as Saint Paul puts it (Philippians 2:7), and identified Himself totally with us by being crucified.

However, because Jesus was God, death could not contain Him. At Pascha we sing that "by death He has trampled on death" and we believe that by dying He has destroyed the power of death. At the heart of our Christian faith is the affirmation that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, conquering forever the power of sin. And, because Christ has conquered death, death no longer needs to have power over us. While human beings continue to die, death is no longer the end of human life, for when we speak of those who have died in Christ, we do not speak of "death" but rather of "sleep" – for they, and all of us, are awaiting "the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come."

Even if we have thousands of acts of great virtue to our credit, our confidence in being heard must be based on God's mercy and His love for men. Even if we stand at the very summit of virtue, it is by mercy that we shall be saved.

Saint John Chrysostom

The merciful God ... makes the heart ache for the salvation of the whole universe, that all may repent and enter Paradise.

Saint Silouan the Athonite

Question Box

If you have a question about the faith and teaching of the Orthodox Church, you can send it to evangelion@goarch.co.za

Can you say something about what Orthodox Christians believe about hell? I have family members who are upset because an uncle (who is not Orthodox) is warning them that God will punish them eternally in hell. I don't feel comfortable with what he's saying, but I don't know how to respond.

There is no doubt that we find warnings about hell and punishment in the Scriptures and in the Fathers of the Church, and Christ Himself warns us of the judgement that is to come. However, we should be careful how we understand and present these, as many of the widely accepted ideas about hell in our society are very different from the faith of the Church.

Firstly, as we repeat over and over again in the Liturgy, God is first and foremost the Lover of humankind. Everything that He does, He does out of love for us. That does not mean that He just accepts anything we do, but it does mean that He never stops reaching out to us and seeking our conversion.

Secondly, in an Orthodox understanding, hell is not a place that God sends us to, but rather a state that we ourselves have chosen. We are free beings and just as we can choose to respond to God's love, so we can also choose to cut ourselves off from it – and when we do so, we will suffer because of it. Saint Isaac the Syrian tells us that those in hell are not deprived of God's love, but they experience it as a bitter torment because they have rejected it.

Thirdly, it is not for us to speculate on the eternal destiny of anyone else. We do not know what goes on in the heart of another, and in any case Christ tells us not to judge. The warnings about hell are meant for us and we should not apply them to anyone else.

Fourthly, we are called to pray for all. Saint Silouan the Athonite tells us that, if we have learnt the divine love of the Holy Spirit, then we will pray for the salvation of all. We cannot say definitively that all people will be saved, for people retain their freedom and can choose not to respond to God. But we do believe that God desires the salvation of all. It is better to pray for people than speculate about things that we cannot know.