

*Saint Gregory of Nyssa
on Holy Baptism:*

The descent into the water, and the trine immersion of the person in it, involves another mystery.

The method of our salvation was made effectual not so much by His precepts in the way of teaching as by the deeds of Him Who has realized an actual fellowship with man.

He has effected life as a living fact, so that by means of the flesh which He has assumed, and at the same time deified, everything kindred and related may be saved along with it.

**3 January 2016 is the
Sunday before Theophany**

Matins Gospel: John 20:19-31

Epistle: 2 Timothy 4:5-8

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

Angelic powers were above Thy tomb, and they that guarded Thee became as dead. And Mary stood by the grave seeking Thine immaculate Body. Thou hast despoiled Hades and wast not tried thereby. Thou didst meet the Virgin and didst grant us life. O Thou Who didst arise from the dead, Lord, glory be to Thee.

**Apolytikion of the Sunday before
Theophany**

Make ready O Zebulum; Prepare yourself O Naphthali; Cease to flow O River Jordan; Receive the Master who comes to be baptized, in joy. Adam, rejoice with the first mother. Do not hide in Paradise, as before, for He came to see us, even naked, that He might clothe us as we were before. Christ has appeared to renew all creation.

Seasonal Kontakion:

In the running waters of the Jordan River, on this day the Lord of all crieth to John: Be not afraid and hesitate not to baptize Me, for I am come to save Adam, the first-formed man.

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Matthew 25:1-13; Galatians 3:23-29; 4:1-5; Mark 5:24-34
Synaxis of the 70 Apostles; Theoctistus the Righteous

Tuesday: Luke 6:17-23; Galatians 5:22-26; 6:1-2; Matthew 11:27-30
Eve of Epiphany; Martyrs Theopemptus and Theonas

Wednesday: Luke 24:13-35; Hebrews 13:17-21; Luke 13:10-17
Holy Epiphany; Theophan the Recluse

Thursday: 2 Timothy 2:20-26; Luke 20:27-44
Synaxis of John the Forerunner; Afterfeast of the Theophany

Friday: 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 4:1-4; Luke 21:12-19
George of Hozeva; Dominica the Righteous

Saturday: Galatians 4:22-27; Luke 8:16-21
Martyr Polyeuctus; Eustratios the Wonderworker



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

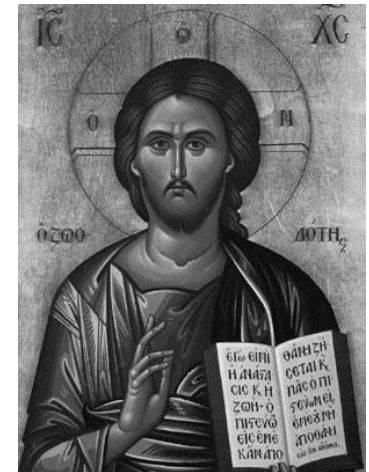
3 January 2016

A New Life

In today's Gospel, we hear the opening words of Saint Mark's Gospel. Unlike Saint Matthew and Saint Luke, Saint Mark does not begin with the accounts of Christ's birth, but rather starts in the desert, where Saint John the Baptist and Forerunner was calling people to repentance. Saint John clearly identified himself with the Old Testament prophets, who called on people to repent of their sins, turn around, and begin a new life, and the Church regards him as the greatest of the prophets. Indeed, he provides a crucial link between the Old Testament and the New.

The call to repentance lies at the heart of our Christian faith, yet its meaning can sometimes be difficult for us to grasp. Many people understand repentance as simply being miserable for one's sins – as if God would want us to be miserable! Others see it as making a huge effort to somehow win favour with God. While repentance certainly involves an element of sorrow for our sins, and while we do need to make an effort to change, the repentance of which the Gospel speaks is deeper than this. True repentance involves an encounter with God which turns our lives around and which is ultimately deeply joyful.

We are all different and so this encounter with God can take many forms, but Saint John was clear that repentance meant a turning to Jesus Christ, and he was preparing his disciples to recognise Christ when He appeared. We do not change our lives by telling ourselves how bad we are, or by trying to be better on our own steam. Rather, we begin to change by encountering the One "who is mightier than I," realising that we are loved by Him, learning to see ourselves as He sees us, and beginning to follow Him in our daily lives, nourished always by His Body which is the Church.



Abba Poeman said concerning Abba Pior that every day he made a new beginning.

From the Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Take care not to forget your Benefactor when you enjoy His benefactions, lest you appear ungrateful to Him; for forgetfulness of a benefactor is a clear sign of ingratitude.

God is your creator, deliverer, supreme benefactor, and good provider.

He created you just as He gives you every good thing, since without His goodness you could not live even for a minute.

You do not see your Benefactor with these eyes, but you see the benefits He has given you.

You see the sun, the moon and His stars which illumine you.

You see the fire that warms you and cooks your food.

You see the food which satisfies you, you see the clothing by which your naked body is covered.

You see all other countless blessings which He gave you for your needs and comfort.

Seeing, then, and receiving these benefits, remember your unseen Benefactor everywhere and always with love, and thank Him for all His benefits with a pure heart.

Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk

The Great Blessing of the Waters

At Theophany on Wednesday we celebrate the rite of the Great Blessing of the Water, which often happens both inside the Church, in which holy water is blessed for our use, and also outside the Church, in which the waters of our surrounding environment are blessed. It begins with the chanting of special hymns and the incensing of the water, and concludes with Bible readings, petitions and prayers.

The prayers and readings all seek to manifest the meaning of this great feast, showing how all creation has longed for the coming of Christ and now rejoices in His presence.



Through the Incarnation of Christ, the Son of God has taken on human flesh and He has now manifested Himself in the River Jordan. Through this, He has sanctified all of created reality – everything is now made holy in Him. Everything that has been corrupted and polluted by our human sinfulness is cleansed and purified by the gracious work of God. The corrupting power of Satan is conquered and all that seeks to poison God's good creation is destroyed as all things are once more made new in Him.

The Theophany of the Lord

On Wednesday, we celebrate the great feast of the Theophany of the Lord. This feast, when we commemorate Christ's baptism by Saint John the Baptist in the River Jordan, marks the public manifestation of Jesus Christ and the beginning of His ministry. In the Nativity, we celebrated the Incarnation of Christ and His coming among us. In this Theophany (sometimes also called His Epiphany), His true identity is revealed and His glory shines forth for all the world to see.

Saint John the Baptist was in the desert, preaching a baptism of repentance. We might wonder, as Saint John himself wondered, why the Sinless One would need to be baptised. Yet Jesus insisted that this was necessary and, in submitting to baptism, He revealed the very depths of His humility. Not only has He taken on our human flesh in the Incarnation, but in His baptism He identifies Himself with sinful humanity, entering into the depths of our brokenness, in order to take our sins upon Himself and to heal us.

However, in Christ's baptism we see not only His humility, but also His glory. His humility and His glory always go together, for the more He pours Himself out for us, the more His glory is revealed. No sooner has Jesus been baptised, than we are told that the Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove, and that a voice from heaven declared: "This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on Him." This is the public manifestation of who Jesus Christ is, the shining forth of His glory for all the world to see. It is the revelation both of the waters that will cleanse us and of the Light that will cast out all darkness.

When the Lord descended today into the waters of the Jordan, He cried aloud to John: 'Be not afraid to baptize me: for I am come to save Adam the first-formed man.'

From the First hour of the Forefeast of the Theophany



Lord, when You were baptized in the Jordan, the veneration of the Trinity was revealed. For the voice of the Father gave witness to You, calling You Beloved, and the Spirit, in the guise of a dove, confirmed the certainty of His words. Glory to You, Christ our God, who appeared and enlightened the world.

Apolytikion for Theophany