



# HOLY TRINITY

## ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



723 N BODINE ST PHILADELPHIA, PA 19123

# CHURCH BULLETIN

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## Sunday before Theophany

### Gospel Reading Mark 1: 1 – 8

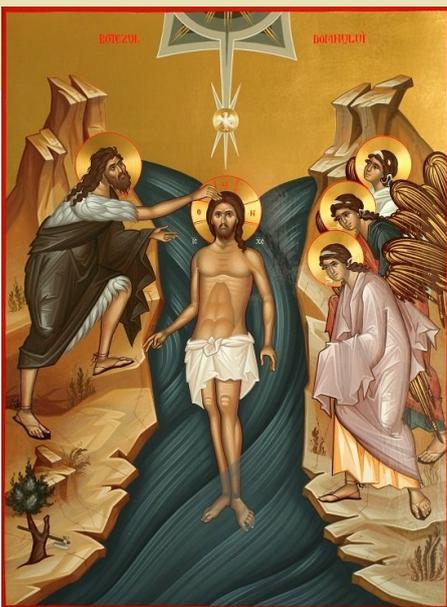
The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who shall prepare your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.' John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all

the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

### Apostle Reading 2 Timothy 4: 5 – 8

Timothy, my son, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry. For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race,

I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.



### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Gospel & Apostle Reading	1
Fr. Robert Miclean: On the Sunday before Theophany	2-3
Liturgical Schedule from January 1 to January 10, 2021	3
Saint Basil the Great	4-6
Fr. Andrew Phillips: Sermon on the Theophany - the Baptism of the Lord	7-8

**Synaxarion.** **Friday January 1, 2021** Holy Hierarch Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea, and his mother Saint Emmelia. **The New Year's Day. January 3, 2021 (Sunday before Theophany):** Holy Prophet Malachi, Holy Martyr Gordius. **Tuesday January 5: Theophany Eve (Fast).** **Wednesday January 6: Theophany of Our Lord Jesus Christ (no fasting).** **Thursday January 7: Synaxis of Saint John the Forerunner and Baptist of Our Lord**

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The editor of the Holy Trinity's newsletter wishes the parishioners and all readers a **HAPPY NEW YEAR 2021!**

## On the Sunday Before Theophany

Today is both a day of preparation as it is a day of decision. In earthly terms, a new year has been born and we've entered into a new time, filled with new decisions, new joys, new trials, and new opportunities. We're also at the door of Theophany, which itself, in heavenly terms, represents to us a new beginning of the most tremendous spiritual magnitude for us.

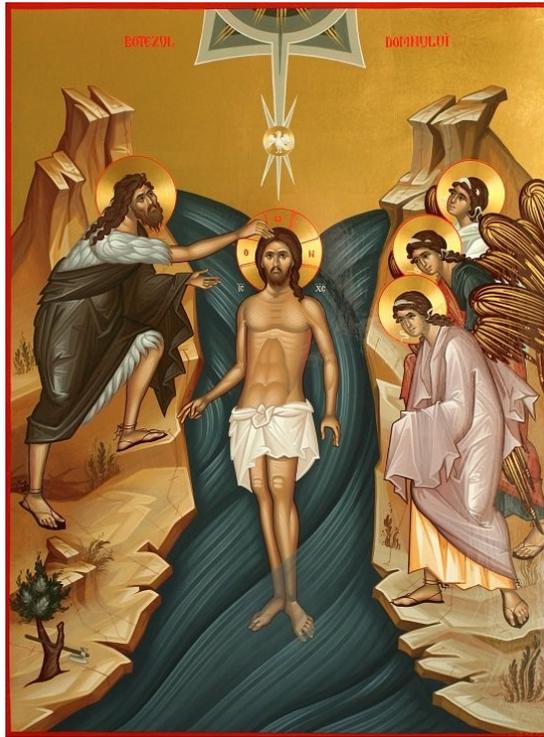
As Christ is baptized into the waters of the Jordan, all is made new, the waters are sanctified just as those who follow Christ into baptism, 'put Him on' (in the language of St. Paul and the Church) and are themselves made anew, as Christ proclaims to us in truth.

And because this is the New Year, many people make New Year resolutions: I'll go on a diet, get more exercise, quit smoking, etc.—all good things, but what about our spiritual resolutions? Where do we want God to take us this year spiritually? What goals have we set for ourselves, our family, our church?

It can be tempting to buy into the thinking that this year will be the same as all other years; that since many of my past resolutions have failed, why try a new one? "I'm this way or that way, I have these passions, I'll never change." All such thinking is pride; it denies the reality of the witness of changed lives we see in the lives of countless sinners turned Saints before us. To deny the possibility of growth and healing from passions and sin-sickness, is to deny the reality of Christ God Himself—the reality we proclaim in the Incarnation and at the Theophany.

Brothers and sisters, time never stands still: this year will bring much change with it—changes in my life, changes in your life. I know in my own life, my family's life, we will have a new baby boy soon. What joy! New life will be with us and with it another brother baptized into Christ.

But also, my Mother is dying. And so, as I gain a life, I'm losing her with whom I was so close all my life. She is going on, we pray, to a new life with Christ in His



Kingdom. My Uncle, just two weeks ago, woke my aunt up to tell her he was having a stroke. Minutes later, his body lay in a hospital bed, paralyzed, and a few hours later, he had reposed. Life is precious. Life on this earth is uncertain. Life with Christ is as certain as it is eternal.

How are we preparing ourselves in Christ to make the most of this season that God's granted us to live? What are you asking God for that you need to more effectively live out your baptism?

St. Paul's words to us today are very sobering, "But you, be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of the evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

Folks, it's time that you see yourself as a missionary, as one who is truly "born anew." How many times do we give ourselves excuses for why we aren't living a life reflective of the Kingdom of God, of one who's walking this life with Christ while we still draw breath?

Let's stop giving ourselves excuses and remember what it is we're fighting for: our participation in the Kingdom, life with Christ, who is the only Life there is.

For this reason, St. Paul says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." In fact, twice today in two different readings, St. Paul admonishes us with analogies to running a race. In our Epistle for this Sunday he reminds us again of this 'race of faith,' saying, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it." (I Cor. 9:24).

Do we see the Kingdom of God and the possibility of growth in life with Him, of deification, as a prize we're willing to put all our efforts into attaining, or do we simply take it for granted?

In today's Gospel, we're reminded of those in St. John the Baptist's day who trusted in their status as sons of Abraham. "Every tree," he says, "which does not bear

good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So the people asked him, saying, ‘What shall we do then?’ The answer comes from him as it does from St. Paul: “Be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” We have all been given by virtue of our baptism into Christ a holy calling, a ministry: Christ calls us “the light of the world,” the “salt of the earth.” St. Paul likens us to Christ’s “ambassadors.” The word is clear: if we are in Christ, we are to live as those in Christ and impact the world around us with His truth.

Resolve that this year be different, better than all the rest. Resolve this year, that you will run the race of faith to win the imperishable crown, that you will take several steps forward in faith, leaving behind the things that trip you up, practices and the ‘same ‘ol’ tired arguments, excuses, habits, whatever, that hold you back from pressing forward in your growth in Christ in His Kingdom. Avail yourself more fully of the Church and its resources (services, the Holy Scriptures, the Lives of the Saints, the books of the Church), commit yourself to growth, give of yourself as a witness of the truth of Christ in an age and a culture of disbelief and you will truly be that evangelist which you and I are called to be because through your humble, honest struggle and discipline, Christ will shine His light, love, and truth through you.

Know this: That those who don’t believe, will see the difference in you and me. Those who see our witness, may grow in being more receptive, or, they may react more vehemently, because by your witness, you are—either way—challenging their status quo and that’s uncomfortable. Take heart, as Christ says, “these things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace; in the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

It is not yet too late for any of us. We have the opportunity to prayerfully commit each day, each moment to Christ—and that is a victory, that is evidence of Christ and His Kingdom at work in me and you—every time we repent, every time we pray, every time we witness to His truth.

I pray for you a most blessed new year, filled with Christ God’s grace, light, and life, that you may bear the fruit of the Kingdom in your life and, that through your life, others too may come to be born anew of water and the spirit.

**Fr. Robert Miclean**

(Source: <https://www.orthodoxannapolis.org/>)

## **HOLY TRINITY’S Liturgical Schedule from January 1 to January 10, 2021**

### **Friday January 1, 2021— Circumcision of Our Lord; New Year’s Day. St Basil the Great:**

9:00 am - Matins  
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy of  
St. Basil the Great  
11:30 pm - Thanksgiving Prayers)  
12:00 pm - Coffee hour

### **Sunday January 3, 2021 (Sunday before the Holy Theophany):**

9:00 am - Matins  
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy  
12:00 pm - Coffee hour

### **Tuesday January 5 -Theophany Eve (Strict Fast)**

### **Wednesday January 6 - Holy Theophany.**

9:00 am - Matins  
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy  
12:00 pm - Great Blessing of the Waters

### **Thursday January 7 - Holy Theophany - Synaxis of St. John the Baptist:**

9:30 am - Matins  
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy  
12:00 pm - Coffee hour

### **Sunday January 10 (Sunday after Theophany):**

9:00 am - Matins  
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy  
12:00 pm - Coffee hour



## Saint Basil the Great

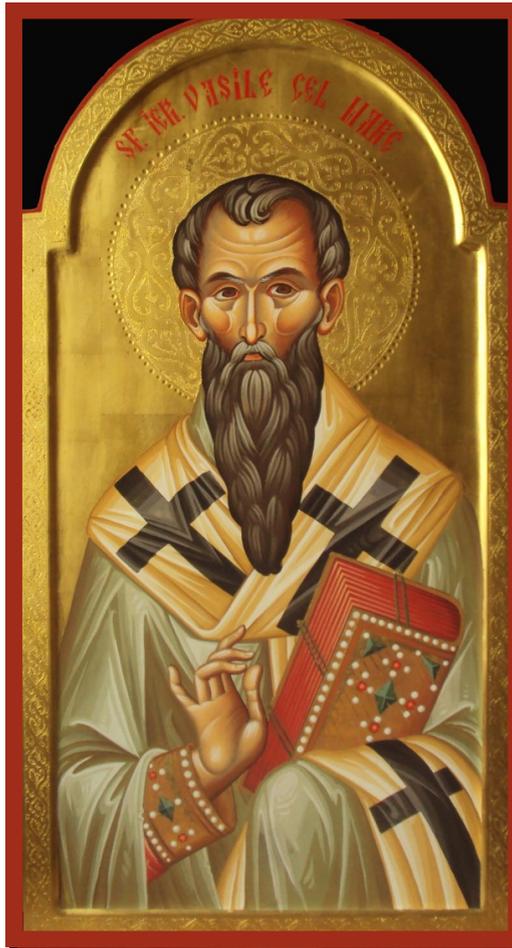
Saint Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, “belongs not to the Church of Caesarea alone, nor merely to his own time, nor was he of benefit only to his own kinsmen, but rather to all lands and cities worldwide, and to all people he brought and still brings benefit, and for Christians he always was and will be a most salvific teacher.” Thus spoke Saint Basil’s contemporary, Saint Amphilochius, Bishop of Iconium.

Saint Basil was born in the year 330 at Caesarea, the administrative center of Cappadocia. He was of illustrious lineage, famed for its eminence and wealth, and zealous for the Christian Faith. The saint’s grandfather and grandmother on his father’s side had to hide in the forests of Pontus for seven years during the persecution under Diocletian.

Saint Basil’s mother Saint Emilia was the daughter of a martyr. On the Greek calendar, she is commemorated on May 30. Saint Basil’s father was also named Basil. He was a lawyer and renowned rhetorician, and lived at Caesarea.

Ten children were born to the elder Basil and Emilia: five sons and five daughters. Five of them were later numbered among the saints: Basil the Great; Macrina (July 19) was an exemplar of ascetic life, and exerted strong influence on the life and character of Saint Basil the Great; Gregory, afterwards Bishop of Nyssa (January 10); Peter, Bishop of Sebaste (January 9); and Theosebia, a deaconess (January 10).

Saint Basil spent the first years of his life on an estate belonging to his parents at the River Iris, where he was raised under the supervision of his mother Emilia and grandmother Macrina. They were women of great refinement, who remembered an earlier bishop of Cappadocia, Saint Gregory the Wonderworker (November 17). Basil received his initial education under the supervision of his father, and then he studied under the finest teachers in Caesarea of Cappadocia, and it was here that he made the acquaintance of Saint Gregory the Theologian (January 25 and January 30). Later, Basil transferred to a school at



Constantinople, where he listened to eminent orators and philosophers. To complete his education Saint Basil went to Athens, the center of classical enlightenment.

After a four or five year stay at Athens, Basil had mastered all the available disciplines. “He studied everything thoroughly, more than others are wont to study a single subject. He studied each science in its very totality, as though he would study nothing else.” Philosopher, philologist, orator, jurist, naturalist, possessing profound knowledge in astronomy, mathematics and medicine, “he was a ship fully laden with learning, to the extent permitted by human nature.”

At Athens a close friendship developed between Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian (Nazianzus), which continued throughout their life. In fact, they regarded themselves as one soul in two bodies. Later on, in his eulogy for Basil the Great, Saint Gregory the Theologian speaks with delight about this period: “Various hopes guided us, and indeed inevitably, in learning... Two paths opened up before us: the one to our sacred temples and the teachers therein; the other towards preceptors of disciplines beyond.”

About the year 357, Saint Basil returned to Caesarea, where for a while he devoted himself to rhetoric. But soon, refusing offers from Caesarea’s citizens who wanted to entrust him with the education of their offspring, Saint Basil entered upon the path of ascetic life.

After the death of her husband, Basil’s mother, her eldest daughter Macrina, and several female servants withdrew to the family estate at Iris and there began to lead an ascetic life. Basil was baptized by Dianios, the Bishop of Caesarea, and was tonsured a Reader (On the Holy Spirit, 29). He first read the Holy Scriptures to the people, then explained them.

Later on, “wishing to acquire a guide to the knowledge of truth”, the saint undertook a journey into Egypt, Syria and Palestine, to meet the great Christian ascetics dwelling there. On returning to Cappadocia, he decided to do as they did. He distributed his wealth to the needy, then settled on the opposite side of the river not far from his

mother Emilia and sister Macrina, gathering around him monks living a cenobitic life.

By his letters, Basil drew his good friend Gregory the Theologian to the monastery. Saints Basil and Gregory labored in strict abstinence in their dwelling place, which had no roof or fireplace, and the food was very humble. They themselves cleared away the stones, planted and watered the trees, and carried heavy loads. Their hands were constantly calloused from the hard work. For clothing Basil had only a tunic and monastic mantle. He wore a hairshirt, but only at night, so that it would not be obvious.

In their solitude, Saints Basil and Gregory occupied themselves in an intense study of Holy Scripture. They were guided by the writings of the Fathers and commentators of the past, especially the good writings of Origen. From all these works they compiled an anthology called *Philokalia*. Also at this time, at the request of the monks, Saint Basil wrote down a collection of rules for virtuous life. By his preaching and by his example Saint Basil assisted in the spiritual perfection of Christians in Cappadocia and Pontus; and many indeed turned to him. Monasteries were organized for men and for women, in which places Basil sought to combine the cenobitic (koine bios, or common) lifestyle with that of the solitary hermit.

During the reign of Constantius (337-361) the heretical teachings of Arius were spreading, and the Church summoned both its saints into service. Saint Basil returned to Caesarea. In the year 362 he was ordained deacon by Bishop Meletius of Antioch. In 364 he was ordained to the holy priesthood by Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea. "But seeing," as Gregory the Theologian relates, "that everyone exceedingly praised and honored Basil for his wisdom and reverence, Eusebius, through human weakness, succumbed to jealousy of him, and began to show dislike for him." The monks rose up in defense of Saint Basil. To avoid causing Church discord, Basil withdrew to his own monastery and concerned himself with the organization of monasteries.

With the coming to power of the emperor Valens (364-378), who was a resolute adherent of Arianism, a time of troubles began for Orthodoxy, the onset of a great struggle. Saint Basil hastily returned to Caesarea at the request of Bishop Eusebius. In the words of Gregory the Theologian, he was for Bishop Eusebius "a good advisor, a righteous representative, an expounder of the Word of God, a staff for the aged, a faithful support in internal matters, and an activist in external matters."

From this time church governance passed over to Basil, though he was subordinate to the hierarch. He preached

daily, and often twice, in the morning and in the evening. During this time Saint Basil composed his Liturgy. He wrote a work "On the Six Days of Creation" (Hexaemeron) and another on the Prophet Isaiah in sixteen chapters, yet another on the Psalms, and also a second compilation of monastic rules. Saint Basil wrote also three books "Against Eunomius," an Arian teacher who, with the help of Aristotelian concepts, had presented the Arian dogma in philosophic form, converting Christian teaching into a logical scheme of rational concepts.

Saint Gregory the Theologian, speaking about the activity of Basil the Great during this period, points to "the caring for the destitute and the taking in of strangers, the supervision of virgins, written and unwritten monastic rules for monks, the arrangement of prayers [Liturgy], the felicitous arrangement of altars and other things." Upon the death of Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea, Saint Basil was chosen to succeed him in the year 370. As Bishop of Caesarea, Saint Basil the Great was the newest of fifty bishops in eleven provinces. Saint Athanasius the Great (May 2), with joy and with thanks to God welcomed the appointment to Cappadocia of such a bishop as Basil, famed for his reverence, deep knowledge of Holy Scripture, great learning, and his efforts for the welfare of Church peace and unity.

Under Valens, the external government belonged to the Arians, who held various opinions regarding the divinity of the Son of God, and were divided into several factions. These dogmatic disputes were concerned with questions about the Holy Spirit. In his books *Against Eunomios*, Saint Basil the Great taught the divinity of the Holy Spirit and His equality with the Father and the Son. Subsequently, in order to provide a full explanation of Orthodox teaching on this question, Saint Basil wrote his book *On the Holy Spirit* at the request of Saint Amphilochius, the Bishop of Iconium.

Saint Basil's difficulties were made worse by various circumstances: Cappadocia was divided in two under the rearrangement of provincial districts. Then at Antioch a schism occurred, occasioned by the consecration of a second bishop. There was the negative and haughty attitude of Western bishops to the attempts to draw them into the struggle with the Arians. And there was also the departure of Eustathius of Sebaste over to the Arian side. Basil had been connected to him by ties of close friendship. Amidst the constant perils Saint Basil gave encouragement to the Orthodox, **confirmed them in the Faith**, summoning them to bravery and endurance. The holy bishop wrote numerous letters to the churches, to bishops, to clergy and to individuals. **Overcoming the**

“by the weapon of his mouth, and by the arrows of his letters,” as an untiring champion of Orthodoxy, Saint Basil challenged the hostility and intrigues of the Arian heretics all his life. He has been compared to a bee, stinging the Church’s enemies, yet nourishing his flock with the sweet honey of his teaching.

The emperor Valens, mercilessly sending into exile any bishop who displeased him, and having implanted Arianism into other Asia Minor provinces, suddenly appeared in Cappadocia for this same purpose. He sent the prefect Modestus to Saint Basil. He began to threaten the saint with the confiscation of his property, banishment, beatings, and even death.

Saint Basil said, “If you take away my possessions, you will not enrich yourself, nor will you make me a pauper. You have no need of my old worn-out clothing, nor of my few books, of which the entirety of my wealth is comprised. Exile means nothing to me, since I am bound to no particular place. This place in which I now dwell is not mine, and any place you send me shall be mine. Better to say: every place is God’s. Where would I be neither a stranger and sojourner (Ps. 38/39:13)? Who can torture me? I am so weak, that the very first blow would render me insensible. Death would be a kindness to me, for it will bring me all the sooner to God, for Whom I live and labor, and to Whom I hasten.”

The official was stunned by his answer. “No one has ever spoken so audaciously to me,” he said.

“Perhaps,” the saint remarked, “ that is because you’ve never spoken to a bishop before. In all else we are meek, the most humble of all. But when it concerns God, and people rise up against Him, then we, counting everything else as naught, look to Him alone. Then fire, sword, wild beasts and iron rods that rend the body, serve to fill us with joy, rather than fear.”

Reporting to Valens that Saint Basil was not to be intimidated, Modestus said, “Emperor, we stand defeated by a leader of the Church.” Basil the Great again showed firmness before the emperor and his retinue and made such a strong impression on Valens that the emperor dared not give in to the Arians demanding Basil’s exile. “On the day of Theophany, amidst an innumerable multitude of the people, Valens entered the church and mixed in with the throng, in order to give the appearance of being in unity with the Church. When the singing of Psalms began in the church, it was like thunder to his hearing. The emperor beheld a sea of people, and in the altar and all around was splendor; in front of all was Basil, who acknowledged neither by gesture nor by glance, that anything else was going on in church.”

Everything was focused only on God and the altar-table, and the clergy serving there in awe and reverence.

Saint Basil celebrated the church services almost every day. He was particularly concerned about the strict fulfilling of the Canons of the Church, and took care that only worthy individuals should enter into the clergy. He incessantly made the rounds of his own church, lest anywhere there be an infraction of Church discipline, and setting aright any unseemliness. At Caesarea, Saint Basil built two monasteries, a men’s and a women’s, with a church in honor of the Forty Martyrs (March 9) whose relics were buried there. Following the example of monks, the saint’s clergy, even deacons and priests, lived in remarkable poverty, to toil and lead chaste and virtuous lives. For his clergy Saint Basil obtained an exemption from taxation. He used all his personal wealth and the income from his church for the benefit of the destitute; in every center of his diocese he built a poor-house; and at Caesarea, a home for wanderers and the homeless.

Sickly since youth, the toil of teaching, his life of abstinence, and the concerns and sorrows of pastoral service took their toll on him. Saint Basil died on January 1, 379 at age 49. Shortly before his death, the saint blessed Saint Gregory the Theologian to accept the See of Constantinople.

Upon the repose of Saint Basil, the Church immediately began to celebrate his memory. Saint Amphilochius, Bishop of Iconium (November 23), in his eulogy to Saint Basil the Great, said: “It is neither without a reason nor by chance that holy Basil has taken leave from the body and had repose from the world unto God on the day of the Circumcision of Jesus, celebrated between the day of the Nativity and the day of the Baptism of Christ. Therefore, this most blessed one, preaching and praising the Nativity and Baptism of Christ, extolling spiritual circumcision, himself forsaking the flesh, now ascends to Christ on the sacred day of remembrance of the Circumcision of Christ. Therefore, let it also be established on this present day annually to honor the memory of Basil the Great festively and with solemnity.”

Saint Basil is also called “the revealer of heavenly mysteries” (*Ouranophantor*), a “renowned and bright star,” and “the glory and beauty of the Church.” His honorable head is in the Great Lavra on Mount Athos.

(Source: <https://www.oca.org/saints/live>)



## The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness

This is the Sunday before Theophany — the Baptism of Jesus. While many of us may think the beginning verses of the Gospel are about the Lord's birth and his early days, actually most of the Evangelists begin the "Good News" with John the Baptist. This is because John is the Prophet of the Savior's coming, his "Forerunner." Even St. Matthew who begins his Gospel with the Lord's genealogy and birth, follows immediately with the account of Jesus' baptism by the hand of John.

The Gospel lesson for this Sunday is from St Mark 1:1-8 that starts with a reference to the Prophet Isaiah, who speak of the one who will prepare the Messiah's way: "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight'" (Mark 1:2-3; cf. Is 40:3). St. Mark makes it clear from the outset that John the Baptist is the Forerunner of the Messiah, and that Jesus is the long-awaited Savior.

John is central to the Evangelion, that is, the "Good News" of salvation, in a number of important respects. St. Luke records how his birth, like Jesus' birth, is miraculous. He was born into a "priestly" family. His father Zechariah was of the order of Abijah and his mother was a descendent of Aaron (Luke 1:5). They were a pious couple, but childless, and of an age where conception was highly unlikely. While on service in the Temple in Jerusalem Zechariah received a vision telling him that his wife Elizabeth would conceive and that the son born to them, John, would be a Prophet consecrated to God.

St. Luke also tells us that Elizabeth is a relative of Mary. After Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit she went and visited Elizabeth. When she approached the house and called to her, Elizabeth replies: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy." (Luke 1:42-44).

As he grew to manhood, St. John sets out for the desert and takes up the prophetic mantle of "camel's hair, with a leather belt" (Mark 1:6), but more importantly, he takes on the prophetic voice: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:2)

Some people in Israel thought John was the promised



Messiah. But many more saw John as the manifestation of the Prophet Elijah who most believed would appear to proclaim the Messiah. For his part, John believed that Jesus might be this "Elijah," and hints at this when he says: "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:7-8).

However, the Lord is clear that it is John who is the "Elijah" that had been predicted when He tells his disciples: "Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. ... I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him." (Mark 9:11-13) He goes even further when he says, "Among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist. ... For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. (Matthew 11:11, 13-14)

The way in which John "prepared the way of the Lord" was to call people to repentance. He preached in the desert on the banks of the Jordan River, and there he baptized people. With water from that stream he washed away their sins so that they might be ready to hear and receive the Messiah.

After John had been arrested, Jesus, again referring to John, says to the people following him: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? Why then did you go out? To see someone dressed in soft robes? ... What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'" (Luke 7:24-27)

For us today, even though we know the History of Salvation, even though we know who "Elijah" is, and the identity of the expected Messiah, we still should reflect on and cling to John's words: "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1:7-8) This is our Lord Jesus Christ who will receive baptism for our sins and reveal His heavenly Father to us. He is the one we longed for, and the one we still long for.

**Fr. Nicholas Apostola**

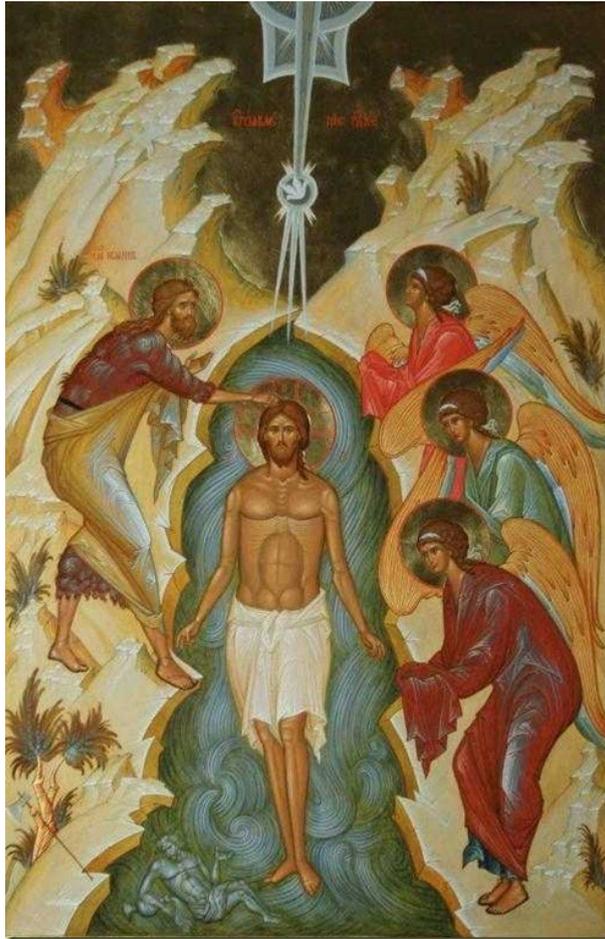
## Sermon on the Theophany - the Baptism of the Lord

Today we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, also called Theophany or Epiphany, words which mean the Appearance of God, and this Feast is also called the Enlightenment. For that is exactly what this Feast is about, it is the first public Appearance of Christ, the beginning of His public preaching at the age of 30, and so the Enlightenment of mankind.

Theophany is in fact one of three Trinitarian Feasts in the Church Year, where 'the worship of the Trinity is made manifest'. For today the voice of the Father bears witness that, 'This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well-pleased', and the Spirit is seen in the form of a dove. Another such Feast is Pentecost, also called Trinity or Trinity Sunday, where the Son sends down the Spirit from the Father, from Whom the Spirit proceeds. Thirdly, there is also the Feast of the Transfiguration, where the voice of the Father is also heard and the Spirit is seen in the form of the Light of Tabor transfiguring the Son.

Today's Feast proves to the world that Christ is both God and man, that He has two natures. On the one hand, the Father calls Him 'My beloved Son' and the Spirit bears witness. On the other hand, as St John the Baptist shows in his humility that he is unworthy even to undo Christ's shoelaces, the sinless human nature of Christ did not need baptism. Christ underwent baptism in his human nature only because He needed to set us an example, to undergo all that we must undergo in order to be worthy of the Kingdom of God. Christ was indeed human flesh and blood - you cannot baptise a spirit or a ghost - Christ truly took on Himself our human nature.

The effects of the Baptism of Christ's human nature, of His body and soul, His mind and will, are immediate, for the world around Him may also be baptised through



Him. In the icon of today's Feast we see in the waters of the Jordan a serpent-monster, a demon lurking in the water. Until the time of Christ, the whole world lay in evil. Through Christ's Coming, however, the whole world can be purified and redeemed. This process began with the purification of water, on which all life depends, of which our own bodies are mainly made up. Through Christ's Baptism the way is open for the baptism of the whole of mankind and the purification of the whole Cosmos. Christ's Baptism was the beginning of the purging of the world from evil. Those who reject Baptism allow the world to be filled with evil once more. This is why we baptise the newborn child, before the seeds of evil can come to lurk in his soul. This is why we sprinkle with Theophany water our homes and work-places, our cars and buses - so that no evil can lurk in them.

But what does Baptism mean for us, however, who are already baptised?

Although we believe that there is only One Baptism, in Church practice we use the word baptism in a figurative sense, for the sacrament of Confession is often called 'a second baptism'. It is through the 'second baptism' of Confession that we can renew ourselves by preparing ourselves to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, in the same way as the waters of the Jordan received Christ bodily when He was baptised. Thus among us too the old waters of the Jordan of human sin can be driven back and sin flees, as the demon-serpent is driven out of us by the Appearance of Christ and His Enlightenment of us. Amen.

**Fr. Andrew Phillips**

(Source: [orthodoxengland.org.uk/sermtheo.htm](http://orthodoxengland.org.uk/sermtheo.htm))