

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. [Galatians 3:27] The Apostle affirms that we have become sons of God through baptism. He did not say that “as many of you as have been baptized have become sons of God,” as the argument seems to require. Instead, he uttered something far more astounding: you ... have put on Christ. If we have put on Christ, the Son of God, then we have also been made like unto Him. We have been brought into a common existence with Him, becoming by grace what He is by nature. ... Each and every Christian has taken on one type and one form – not that of an angel, but of the Master Himself – revealing Christ in Himself. Therefore, we are all one in Christ Jesus. This means, inasmuch as we have one form of Christ imposed upon each of us and we are one Body, then we have one Head, which is Christ.

Blessed Theophylact of Ochrid



8 January is the Sunday after Theophany

Matins Gospel: John 20:1-10

Epistle: Ephesians 4:7-13

Gospel: Matthew 4:12-17

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

Having learned the joyful proclamation of the Resurrection from the Angel, and having cast off the ancestral condemnation, the women disciples of the Lord spake to the Apostles exultantly: Death is despoiled and Christ God is risen, granting great mercy to the world.

Apolytikion of the Sunday after Theophany:

At Your Baptism in the Jordan, O Lord, worship of the Trinity was revealed, for the Father's voice bore witness to You, calling You His 'beloved Son,' and the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the truth of these words. O Christ God, Who appeared and enlightened the world, glory to You!

Seasonal Kontakion:

You appeared to the world today, and Your light, O Lord, has left its mark upon us. With fuller understanding we sing to You: "You came, You were made manifest, the unapproachable light."

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday, 9 January: 2 Timothy 2:1-10; Mark 1:9-15
Martyr Polyeuctus; Eustratios the Wonderworker

Tuesday, 10 January: Ephesians 4:7-13; Luke 3:19-22
Gregory of Nyssa; Dometian, Bishop of Melitene; Theosebia the Deaconess

Wednesday, 11 January: Hebrews 13:7-16; Matthew 11:27-30
Theodosius the Cenobiarch; Vitalis of Gaza

Thursday, 12 January: Acts 18:22-28; John 10:39-42
Martyr Tatiana; Martyr Mertios

Friday, 13 January: Galatians 3:23-29; 4:1-5; Luke 20:1-8
The Holy Martyrs Hermylus & Stratonikus; Maximos the Righteous

Saturday, 14 January: Acts 2:38-43; Luke 4:1-15
Apodosis of Epiphany; Agnes the Virgin-martyr



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

8 January 2017

A Great Light

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 fulfill 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

Saint Gregory of Nyssa

On Tuesday the Church commemorates Saint Gregory of Nyssa, one of the fourth-century Cappadocian Fathers who contributed so much to the Church's understanding of her faith, to her struggles against heresy, and to the development of her spiritual life.

Saint Gregory was born into an illustrious Christian family. His grandparents had lost lands when the Church was still persecuted and his parents, Saint Basil the Elder and Saint Emmelia, had brought him up in an atmosphere of piety. Both his brother, Saint Basil the Great, and his sister, Saint Macrina the Younger, were pioneers in the monastic life.



Despite being a devout Christian, and having been tonsured as a reader, Saint Gregory initially followed in his father's footsteps by embarking on a career in rhetoric. However, Saint Basil soon engaged his help in the challenges that the Church was facing. This was a time when the Church's faith, which had been defined at the Council of Nicaea in 325, was once again coming under attack by the Arians. When Basil became Archbishop of Caesarea in 370, he appointed Gregory as Bishop of Nyssa to support the Orthodox cause.

Saint Gregory endured many struggles as bishop, but his work, especially his writings against the Arians in which he outlined the Church's true faith, ensured that the Orthodoxy triumphed once

more at the Council of Constantinople in 381, which he attended. After the council, he was asked to travel to Palestine and Arabia to settle troubles there and ensure that people were taught the true faith.

Once peace returned to the Church, Saint Gregory was able to devote himself to the spiritual life and to directing the monasteries founded by Saint Basil. In this period, he wrote treatises, such as the *Homilies on the Song of Songs* and *The Life of Moses*, which were to have a profound influence on the Christian understanding of the spiritual life in the centuries to come. His teaching was rooted in the Church's understanding that human beings are created in God's image and reflect His freedom. Although we have misused this freedom, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ means that we can be restored to our original state and enter into a renewed communion with God. Joined by baptism to the Body of Christ, the presence of the Lord can grow ever more and more within us if we exercise the holy virtues and participate in the sacraments. Through this, we can make continual progress to union with God.



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

The Change that Baptism Brings

by Saint Gregory of Nyssa

Baptism is a spiritual birth, but he who is born by spiritual birth must recognize by whom he is born and what kind of creature he must become. In physical birth, those who are born owe their life and existence to the impulse of their parents, but the spiritual birth is in control of the one who is being born. It is the only birth where we can choose and determine what kind of beings we are to become.

Now it is evident to everyone that we must receive the saving birth of baptism for the purpose of growth and renewal and changing in our nature ...

If the essential faculties of our nature are not changed, what then is the change that the grace of baptism must bring about? It is clear that the sinful characteristics of our nature must be changed, and the evil in our life done away with. Undergoing the washing of baptism, we must become purified in our wills and wash away the iniquities of our souls. We must be changed for the better and become different.

If, however, the baptism has only washed the body, and the life after initiation is identical with that life before, then despite the boldness of my assertion, I will say without shrinking that the baptismal water is merely water, and the gift of the Spirit is nowhere in action. This is true not only when anger and hatred deforms and dishonours the image of God in us, but also when covetousness, passion, greed, evil thoughts, pride, envy, jealousy, injustice, lusts of the flesh and adultery continue to operate in us.

If this sort of sinful life characterizes a man's life as much after baptism as before, then I cannot see that he has undergone any change in accordance with God's nature, and he is really of the same corrupt nature as before. Such a man then, who does not change and yet prattles about birth and resurrection ... is deceiving himself. He is not what he has not become!

Now the physically born child shares his parents' nature. If you have been born of God and have become his child, then let your way of life testify to the presence of God within you. Make it clear who your Father is! For the very attributes by which we recognize God are the very marks by which a child of His must reveal his relationship with God. 'God is goodness and there is no unrighteousness in Him.' 'The Lord is gracious to all ... He loves His enemies.' 'He is merciful and forgives transgressions.' These and many other characteristics revealed by the Scripture are what make a Godly life.

