

The Confessor's Tongue for January 5, A. D. 2014

Sunday Before Theophany; Martyrs Theopemptus & Theonas; Ven. Syncletica

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

January 6: The Theophany of Christ

Luminous was the feast which hath passed [Nativity], yet even more glorious is this present day; for on the former the magi worshipped the Savior, but on this a glorious servant hath baptized the Master. Then the shepherds, piping, beheld and marvelled; but now, the voice of the Father hath proclaimed the only-begotten Son. *Vespers Aposticha for January 2*

The meaning of each Feast and each Mystery is found in its hymns. Thus, we learn that Theophany is even greater than Nativity (contrary to the emphasis of our culture which makes Christmas the feast of feasts, pays no heed at all to Theophany/Epiphany, and reduces Holy Pascha (Easter) to one Sunday). At the Nativity of Christ, we celebrate the birth of the God-man in the flesh. At the Theophany, we celebrate the manifestation of not only Christ's divinity but also the first manifestation to man of the Holy Trinity as the Forerunner, the Father, and the Spirit all bear witness to Christ as the Son and Lamb of God. Christ sanctifies the waters through His Baptism for our regeneration. The sinless One who needs no cleansing receives baptism from the hand of a servant for our cleansing. Let us rejoice in the Feast!

We celebrate Theophany through its leavetaking on January 14. We use the troparion and kontakion of the Feast in our daily prayers and at meals in place of the usual "Our Father" and "We give thanks..."

Theophany, Troparion, tone 1

When Thou, O Lord wast baptized in the Jordan / the worship of the Trinity was made manifest. / For the voice of the Father bare witness to Thee, / naming Thee His beloved Son. / And the Spirit, in the form of dove, / confirmed the certainty of that word. / O Christ our God, who hast manifested Thyself and enlightened the world // glory to Thee.

Theophany, Kontakion, tone 4

Today Thou hast appeared to the universe / and Thy Light, O Lord, hath shone on us, / who with understanding praise Thee: / Thou hast come and revealed Thyself, // O Light unapproachable!

On The Holy Water

Let all be aware concerning the Holy Water which we bless at Theophany: those who abstain from drinking the Holy Water because they have eaten are not acting correctly; for the Holy Water has been provided by the grace of God for the sanctification of the world and all creation. Wherefore, it is sprinkled in all places, even dishonorable ones, and even in places where it may be trodden underfoot. Where, then, is the logic in abstaining from it? But be aware that impurity comes upon us not because of eating, but because of our

abominable acts; and that we may be cleansed from them, we drink this Holy Water without doubting.

Christ through His Baptism has sanctified the nature of water. For this reason, on the Eve of the Feast, after the blessing of the water, we take some home and keep it throughout the year, making regular use of it. 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.

By pious custom, the blessed waters of Theophany are taken home after the Great Blessing of Waters for the spiritual refreshment of soul and body and the sanctification of our dwellings. The water is drunk every day from the Feast (Jan 6) through its leavetaking (Jan 14). At other times, when we cannot come to church, or when we feel ill, are embarking upon a journey, are especially tempted, etc., we should resort to these blessed waters, partaking of them with prayer and deep faith.

Holy Water is kept in the church throughout the year for the faithful to take home as needed.

Old Holy Water may be disposed of by pouring it out on plants. It should not be poured down the drain.

From St. Syncletica in the Desert Fathers

3. She also said, "just as the most bitter medicine drives out poisonous creatures, so prayer joined to fasting drives evil thoughts away."

13. She also said, "It is good not to get angry, but if this should happen, the Apostle does not allow you a whole day for this passion, for he says, 'Let not the sun go down.' Will you wait till all your time is ended? Why hate the man who has grieved you? It is not he who has done the wrong, but the devil. Hate sickness but not the sick person."

21. She also said, "Just as a treasure that is exposed loses its value, so a virtue which is known vanishes, just as wax melts when it is near fire, so the soul is destroyed by praise and loses all the results of its labor."

26. She also said, "Just as one cannot build a ship unless one has some nails, so it is impossible to be saved without humility."

27. She also said, "There is grief that is useful and there is grief that is destructive. The first sort consists in weeping over one's faults and weeping over the weakness of one's neighbors, in order not to destroy one's purpose, and attach oneself to the perfect good. But there is also a grief that comes from the enemy, full of mockery, which some call *accidie*. This spirit must be cast out, mainly by prayer and psalmody."

Balaam's Donkey or Thoughts of a Sinner

Photius Kontoglou

The poor manger where Christ is born is the humble heart into which He enters and "makes a dwelling." He is never born in vain places.

No book is so simple and so clear as is the Gospel. And despite this, no book can be twisted so easily as the Gospel, because the human heart is wicked.

The more we feel in our hearts gratitude that we exist and for the whole world, and we want to give thanks, the closer we come to the faith of Christ. We want to cry, to forgive the wicked, and to give thanks also for those things which previously had seemed bad to us.

My soul is comforted when I look at the holy icons of Byzantine iconography. I think I am reading the Gospel. This art is a healing for the eyes.

"The Kingdom of God suffers violence, and the violent take it by force" (Mt 11:12). The Kingdom of God is gained with struggle, with affliction, and with harsh forcefulness on our bodies, and especially on our spirit, that is, on our egotism and our knowledge.

The fewer words a Christian says, the more he learns; and the less he examines, the more he is illumined.

When someone has been healed of the rage to grab and rip people apart, treating his neighbor unjustly, people call that person lazy and indifferent, because all the activity of humanity is none other than this mania.

The world has no need of Christ, as long as it has its own darkness as light.

A great chasm is formed between Christians and others, even if the others are the best, most philanthropic ones. It's like another world. Completely another creation, "a new creation."

One whose heart has not had misfortune and has not been hurt or tightened, has not truly felt the hope of God.

Whoever has not despaired of everything does not run near God, because he considers that other protectors exist for him to lean on.

Whoever has been greatly embittered by the world is sweetened more by God, and nothing else pleases him anymore, except Christ, the saints, and humble Christians.

When we become Christians, the praises of people leave a bitter taste inside us, whereas the accusations of others embitter us sweetly and make us draw into ourselves, and our heart becomes warmer.

Christ enlarged man's heart, which haughtiness had narrowed. Humility widened it, something most strange.

He who sinned in the flesh is saved more easily than he who sinned with the spirit.

Photius Kontoglou was a famous 20th century Greek Iconographer and Theologian who had a great influence on his generation.

A Word of Thanks

Father Justin and Matushka Michelle desire to thank all of you for the love you have shown us this past year through your thoughtful gifts, your unstinting generosity, your prayers, and your help. God has blessed us richly through you, and we are honored to serve you. Thank you, and may our Lord preserve you all on the path of salvation in 2014!

Call to the Altar

At the end of very Litany, the Holy Church extends an invitation to each person present: "Let us commend ourselves, each other, and all our life, unto Christ our God." Every time we worship, every time we pray, whether at church or at home, if we are worshipping or praying correctly, we are commending ourselves to God, entrusting ourselves to His care, putting ourselves in His hands at His disposal. We come to God in prayer and worship to lay ourselves on the altar as a living sacrifice.

We must do this because man's tendency is to try to run his life for himself, trusting in himself and his own resources. Even when he prays and entrusts himself to God, he is prone to worry. Doubting that God can care for his needs quite so well as he himself can, he removes the offering just made of himself from the altar and takes it back into his own care. But a few minutes later, the invitation to the altar is made again, and if the worshipper is attentive, he may again lay himself and all his cares on the altar, entrusting his life to God.

Prayer then takes on the character of a desperate struggle with self-will to overcome it and submit oneself to God. The struggles seesaws between humble surrender and desperate clinging to control. But for man's health and salvation, humble surrender and commendation of self to God must prevail. The believer practices this in church services. He must engage the struggle there, become aware of it, become aware of his efforts to take back what he has just commended to God, and persist in commending himself and all his life. Having practiced at church, he takes his awareness with him into the world to continue the effort to commend himself, others, and all his life to Christ. In this is peace and victory over fear and worry. By this the door to God's provision and power is opened. May we attend to commending ourselves, each other, and all our life to Christ Our God in this new year which the Lord has made!

Upcoming Events 2014

18 January 9:00 a.m. Parish Workday
20 January 6:00 p.m. Vigil for St. Maximus
17-20 February Diocese of the South Pastoral Conference at St. Maximus
2 March Forgiveness Sunday, Vespers, 6:00 p.m.
20 April Great and Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!