

The Confessor's Tongue for January 4, A. D. 2015

Sunday Before Theophay; Holy 70 Apostles

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 Profit of Spiritual Teachings— Even When One Does Not Recall Them

A brother said to an old man, "See, abba, I frequently ask the Fathers to give me an earnest reminder for the salvation of my soul, and I do not remember a thing of what they tell me." Now the old man had two empty vessels, and he said to the brother, "Go, bring one of the vessels and pour water in it: rinse it, pour it out, and put it back in its place, all shiny." The brother did this several times, and the old man said to him, "Bring both vessels at once." And when he had brought them, the old man said,

"Of the two, which is cleaner?" The brother answered, "The one I put water in and cleaned." Then the old man said to him, "Son, thus it is with the soul that frequently hears the word of God; though the soul remembers nothing of what she asked, she is nonetheless cleansed more than the soul that did not inquire."

On the Baptismal Garment: the Robe of Light

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water & the Spirit*

We know already that the unvesting of the catechumen before Baptism signified the rejection of him of the "old man" and the "old life," that of sin and corruption. It is indeed *sin* that revealed their nakedness to Adam and Eve and made them conceal it with vestments. But why were they not ashamed of their nakedness before sin? Because they were vested in divine glory and light, in the "ineffable beauty" which is the true nature of man. It is this first garment that they lost, and they "knew that they were naked". But then the post-baptismal vesting in the "robe of light" signifies above all the return of man to the integrity and innocence he had in Paradise, the recovery by him of his true nature obscured and mutilated by sin. St. Ambrose compares the baptismal robe to the vestments of Christ on Mt. Tabor. The Transfigured Christ reveals perfect and sinless humanity as not "naked" but vested in garments "white like snow," in the uncreated light of divine glory. It is Paradise, not sin that reveals the true nature of man; it is to Paradise and to his true nature, to his primordial vestment of glory, that man returns in Baptism.

On The Holy Water

Let all be aware concerning the Holy Water: 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.

The feeling of extreme sinfulness is often, especially in youth, but another form of the passion of pride: 'I am extraordinary in everything, even my sins are deeper, more dazzling, that those of other men.'

From The Diary of a Russian Priest

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.

The Blessing of Homes

Homes are customarily blessed after the Great Blessing of Waters at Theophany. This is a brief service in the home of prayer and sanctifying the house through the sprinkling of holy water. A longer order of blessing is often used for the first blessing and cleansing of a new home.

With the house cleaned and ready, we dress as we would for a church service. When the priest arrives, we turn off the television, radio, stereo, etc. Pets that may interfere are placed out of the way. A small table may be set up before the Icon Corner, upon which a wide-mouthed but small bowl full of newly blessed water is placed. A lit candle, censer (if you have one), and icon are placed on the table. These things should be arranged before the priest arrives.

Family members and any guests gather and stand before the small table. The first names of those residing in the home are printed on a piece of paper and placed on the table. Proper baptismal names should be used.

One family member may carry the lit candle, going before the priest and leading him through the house, turning on lights, opening doors, etc. The other family members may accompany the priest or may stay at the table (children, though, usually want to see their rooms blessed).

After the service, some of the faithful will make an offering to the church or give a gift to the priest. There is no obligation to do this, but if done, it is done following the service.

Take advantage of having the priest in your home for the house blessing to ask questions or to voice any concerns you may have. Some parishioners desire a more extended visit or to have a meal with the priest. This should be arranged beforehand.

Upcoming Events 2015

- 6 January: Holy Theophany & House Blessing Season
- 1 February: Triodion is opened
- 2 February: Meeting of the Lord in the Temple
- 22 February: Forgiveness Sunday. Forgiveness Vespers, the Liturgical beginning of Great Lent, will be served at 6:00. All members should plan now on attending this service.
- 23-28 February: Clean Week, first week of Lent.
- 12 April: Pascha.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!