

The Confessor's Tongue for January 3, A. D. 2020

30th Sunday after Pentecost; Prophet Malachi; St. Genevieve of Paris

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 Holy Theophany of Our Lord

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 feast of the Baptism of our Lord is also called the *Theophany* or *Epiphany (Manifestation of God, Manifestation from above)*, because at the baptism of Jesus Christ, the Trinity was present and manifested: the Son of God received baptism in the Jordan River; God the Father testified to His Son by a voice from Heaven; and the Holy Spirit, appearing in the form of a dove, confirmed the words of God the Father. In ancient times, the catechumens used to receive the Sacrament of Baptism on the vigil of this day, whence it also received the name of "Feast of Illumination."

The special feature of the Feast of Theophany is "the consecration of the waters." In all churches it takes place on the eve of the feast, after the Liturgy or Vespers. In some churches, it is repeated on the day of the Feast after Liturgy, on rivers and lakes, whither the clergy go in procession, with cross and banners. The first consecration is retained as a reminder of the baptism which catechumens used to receive on this day, and of the vows which we ourselves took at our own baptism. The second consecration takes place in memory of the Baptism of Our Lord; hence the procession is called "going to Jordan."

Theophany is indeed a great feast. Liturgically it renews the joy of Christmas, shows us the incarnate God in a new light, and deepens our appreciation of the Incarnation itself. It is, in fact, so much like another Christmas that even the services are similar. As Christmas is the manifestation of the boundless love of God for man, so Theophany is the great revelation of the divinity of our Lord. The two feasts thus supplement one another. Theophany proclaims that the little Child of Bethlehem is really God, pointing from earth to heaven. Christmas, on the other hand, tells us that God became for us a little Child, tracing His descent from heaven to earth. Where at Christmas only shepherds saw that the Word was made flesh, at Theophany the voice of God the Father summons the whole world to adore Jesus. The faithful do well to participate as fully as possible in the cycle of services for 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!

Petition for the Plague

Since early last year, we have inserted the following petition in our augmented litanies for times of sickness and epidemic. Let's look at it for a moment that we may understand what we ask.

More than all others, we have sinned against Thee, and we have transgressed, O Master; and if we have not acquired repentance, instead of repentance, accept our offering. And having set Thyself to mercy, as Thou art almighty, free Thy servants from death-bearing and grievous afflictions, groaning in pain we pray Thee, quickly hearken and have mercy.

The Church responds to times of crisis, war, epidemic, unrest in prayer and repentance, looking to Christ, confessing our sin, which is the ultimate cause of all that is wrong in the world. To "sin" is to fall short of the glory of God both by omission and commission. To "transgress" is to sin aggressively, to do wrong to God or others; it is trespassing on someone else's property, crossing the boundary lines. We confess our sins and transgressions recognizing that they likely have something to do with what we are suffering.

As a nation, our sins are many and varied. We have lived comfortably. We are rich, proud, complacent, boastful, greedy, lustful. We frequently call good "evil" and evil "good". We are ungrateful to God for all His blessings, if we even acknowledge that the good we enjoy comes from Him. We are at war with the way God has made man. We have rejected His law. We have not lived according to Christ's commandments. And as Orthodox Christians, how well have we lived up to our high calling? We all have much for which to repent.

In the present, we suffer from an epidemic, that has been magnified by changed definitions and media hype, into a pandemic. We also suffer from the measures taken to fight the virus. If it is possible to quantify suffering, it seems that the suffering from the virus itself is dwarfed by the suffering imposed on people all around the world by the measures governments are taking against it. The suffering is real, whether you agree with the measures taken by government and think they are necessary, or you disagree and find them excessive and unjustified.

The Christian response to all this suffering is repentance. Repentance means we identify our many sins, humbly confess them, and seek by God's grace not to repeat them. True repentance does not always come easily or quickly. Sometimes it must be cultivated for an extended time while we suffer the consequences of our sin. Thus the petitions says, if we have not acquired repentance, please, God, accept our little offering of this petition at each service in lieu of repentance, or as a harbinger of repentance to come. The petition admits our poverty of repentance and dares to ask God for mercy! We ask God to set us from "death-bearing and grievous afflictions." Those afflictions may be directly from the virus. They may equally come from the measures taken against the virus. We ask God to deliver us because He is merciful and we are willing and starting to repent. We acknowledge His power to change our circumstances and deliver us from both the virus and the oppressive, destructive measures taken against it.

Fr. Justin

Our age is an age of moderate virtue
And of moderate vice
When men will not lay down the Cross
Because they will never assume it.
Yet nothing is impossible, nothing,
To men of faith and conviction.
Let us therefore make perfect our will.

O God, help us. T.S. Eliot

On the Use of Holy Water

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.

St. Seraphim, after hearing the confessions of pilgrims, always gave them to drink from a cup of holy water. The elder heiroschmemamonk Seraphim used to say that there was no stronger medice than holy water and holy oil.

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.

Prayer Before Partaking of Prosphora and Holy Water

O Lord my God, may Thy holy gift and Thy holy water be for the remission of my sins, for the enlightenment of my mind, for the strengthening of my soul and body, for the health of my soul and body, for the conquering of my passions and infirmities, according to Thy mercy that hath no limit, through the prayers of Thy most pure Mother and all Thy saints. Amen.

Choruses from the Rock

T. S. Eliot, 1934

This poem of T.S. Eliot, inspired by his faith in Christ, speaks much truth to us today.

VIII (6th & final installment)

O Father we welcome your words.
And we will take heart for the future,
Remembering the past.
The heathen are come into thine inheritance,
And thy temple have they defiled.
Who is this that cometh from Edom?
He has trodden the wine-press alone.

There came one who spoke of the shame of Jerusalem
And the holy places defiled;
Peter the Hermit, scourging with words.
And among his hearers were a few good men,
Many who were evil,
And most who were neither.
Like all men in all places,

Some went from love of glory,
Some went who were restless and curious,
Some were rapacious and lustful.
Many left their bodies to the kites of Syria
Or sea-strewn along the routes;
Many left their souls in Syria,
Living on, sunken in moral corruption;
Many came back well broken,
Diseased and beggared, finding
A stranger at the door in possession:
Came home cracked by the sun of the East
And the seven deadly sins in Syria.

But our King did well at Acre.
And in spite of all the dishonour,
The broken standards, the broken lives,
The broken faith in one place or another,
There was something left that was more than the tales
Of old men on winter evenings.
Only the faith could have done what was good of it.
Whole faith of a few,
Part faith of many.
Not avarice, lechery, treachery,
Envy, sloth, gluttony, jealousy, pride:
It was not these that made the Crusades,
But these that unmade them.

Remember the faith that took men from home
At the call of a wandering preacher.
Our age is an age of moderate virtue
And of moderate vice
When men will not lay down the Cross
Because they will never assume it.
Yet nothing is impossible, nothing,
To men of faith and conviction.
Let us therefore make perfect our will.
O God, help us.

IX

Son of Man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears
And set thine heart upon all that I show thee.
Who is this that has said: the House of God is a House of Sorrow;
We must walk in black and go sadly, with long-drawn faces.
We must go between empty walls, quavering lowly, whispering faintly,
Among a few flickering scattered lights?
They would put upon God their own sorrow, the grief they should feel
For their sins and faults as they go about their daily occasions.
Yet they walk in the street proudnecked, like thoroughbreds ready for races,
Adorning themselves, and busy in the market, the forum, And all other secular meetings.
Thinking good of themselves, ready for any festivity, Doing themselves very well.
Let us mourn in a private chamber, learning the way of penitence,
And dien let us learn the joyful communion of saints.
The soul of Man must quicken to creation.
Out of the formless stone, when the artist united himself with stone,
Spring always new forms of life, from the soul of man that is joined to the soul of stone;
Out of the meaningless practical shapes of all that is living or lifeless
Joined with the artist's eye, new life, new form, new colour.
Out of the sea of sound the life of music,
Out of the slimy mud of words, out of the sleet and hail of verbal imprecisions,
Approximate thoughts and feelings, words that have taken the place of thoughts and feelings,
There spring the perfect order of speech, and the beauty of incantation.

Lord, shall we not bring these gifts to Your service?
Shall we not bring to Your service all our powers
For life, for dignity, grace and order.
And intellectual pleasures of the senses?
The Lord who created must wish us to create
And employ our creation again in His service
Which is already His service in creating.
For Man is joined spirit and body,

And therefore must serve as spirit and body.
Visible and invisible, two worlds meet in Man;
Visible and invisible must meet in His Temple;
You must not deny the body.

Now you shall see the Temple completed:
After much striving, after many obstacles:
For the work of creation is never without travail;
The formed stone, the visible crucifix,
The dressed altar, the lifting light,
Light
Light
The visible reminder of Invisible Light.

X.

You have seen the house built, you have seen it adorned By one who came in the night, it is now dedicated to God. It is now a visible church, one more light set on a hill In a world confused and dark and disturbed by portents of fear.
And what shall we say of the future? Is one church all we can build?
Or shall the Visible Church go on to conquer the World?
The great snake lies ever half awake, at the bottom of the pit
of the world, curled
In folds of himself until he awakens in hunger and moving his head to right and to left prepares for his hour to devour. But the Mystery of Iniquity is a pit too deep for mortal eyes to plumb. Come
Ye out from among those who prize the serpent's golden eyes,
The worshippers, self-given sacrifice of the snake. Take Your way and be ye separate.
Be not too curious of Good and Evil;
Seek not to count the future waves of Time;
But be ye satisfied that you have light
Enough to take your step and find your foothold.

O Light Invisible, we praise Thee!
Too bright for mortal vision.
O Greater Light, we praise Thee for the less;
The eastern light our spires touch at morning,
The light that slants upon our western doors at evening.
The twilight over stagnant pools at batflight,
Moon light and star light, owl and moth light,
Glow-worm glowlight on a grassblade.
O Light Invisible, we worship Thee!

We thank Thee for the lights that we have kindled,
The light of altar and of sanctuary;
Small lights of those who meditate at midnight
And lights directed through the coloured panes of windows
And light reflected from the polished stone,
The gilded carven wood, the coloured fresco.
Our gaze is submarine, our eyes look upward
And see the light that fractures through unquiet water.
We see the light but see not whence it comes.
O Light Invisible, we glorify Thee!

In our rhythm of earthly life we tire of light. We are glad
when the day ends, when the play ends; and ecstasy is too

much pain.

We are children quickly tired: children who are up in the night
and fall asleep as the rocket is fired; and the day is long for work or play.

We tire of distraction or concentration, we sleep and are glad

to sleep,

Controlled by the rhythm of blood and the day and the night
and the seasons.

And we must extinguish the candle, put out the light and relight it;

Forever must quench, forever relight the flame.

Therefore we thank Thee for our little light, that is dappled

with shadow.

We thank Thee who hast moved us to building, to finding,
to forming at the ends of our fingers and beams of our eyes.

And when we have built an altar to the Invisible Light, we may
set thereon the little lights for which our bodily vision is made.

And we thank Thee that darkness reminds us of light.
O Light Invisible, we give Thee thanks for Thy great glory!

Let your first act, as soon as you wake up, be the sign of the Cross, and let your first words be the words of the Jesus Prayer. St. Barsanuphius of Optina

Lay House Blessing at Theophany

Head of House: Through the Prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God have mercy on us. Amen.

Glory to Thee, O God, glory to Thee.

All sing: O Heavenly King, / Comforter, Spirit of Truth, / who art everywhere present and fillest all things, / Treasury of good things, / and Giver of life, come and abide in us, / and cleanse us from every stain, // and save our souls, O Good One.

All or head: Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us! (3x) Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

All-holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, cleanse us from our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, look upon and heal our infirmities for Thy name's sake.

Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God have mercy on us. Amen.

Troparion, tone 8 Sing or Read.

As salvation came unto the house of Zaccheus at Thine entrance, O Christ, / and likewise now at the entrance of Thy sacred ministers, and with them Thy holy Angels / do Thou grant thy peace unto this house and mercifully bless it, // saving and illumining all who live in it.

Head of House: O Lord Jesus Christ our God, who wast baptized by John in the Jordan to renew all men by the waters of regeneration, and who wast pleased to enter under the roof of Zacchaeus the Publican, and didst bring salvation unto him and all his house: Do Thou Thyself now also preserve unharmed by any evil thing all of us who live here, Names., and who offer unto Thee prayers and supplications. Send down Thy blessing on our home, keep our life always free from snares, and abundantly grant us, by Thy blessing, every good thing that is profitable for us. For unto Thee is due all glory, honor, and worship, together with Thy Father who is without beginning, and Thy Most-holy, Good, and Life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

All: Amen.

Procession through house. All sing Troparion (below). One family member leads the Head of the House, bearing a lit candle. Another may carry the holy water. Incense may be used also. Head of house sprinkles the house with Holy Water. "Lord, bless this house and us who live in it by the sprinkling of this Holy Water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

All: Troparion of Theophany, 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 a dove / confirmed the certainty of that word. / O Christ, our God, who hast manifested Thyself and enlightened the world, // Glory to Thee!

At the end of the procession, we sing the Kontakion, tone 4.

Thou hast revealed Thyself today to the universe, / And Thy Light, O Lord, is signed upon us, / who with knowledge praise Thee: / Thou art come and art manifest, // O Light inaccessible.

All Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy!

Head: Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God have mercy on us.

All: Amen.

Upcoming Events 2021

6 January: Holy Theophany

21 January: St. Maximus

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!