

The Confessor's Tongue for December 31, 2023

30th Sunday after Pentecost: Leavetaking of Nativity; St. Melania of Rome

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.

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January 6: Holy Theophany of Our Lord

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 services on this day are the same as on the day of the Nativity of Christ. The vigil is a day of fasting, as strict as that of the eve of Nativity; and on the day following (January 7) the faithful congregate to celebrate "the worshipful and glorious Prophet and Forerunner, John the Baptizer of Christ."

The special feature of the service on the day of the Epiphany 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 origin of Theophany can be traced to apostolic times. The Apostolic Constitutions mention it: "Let us celebrate the fast of Theophany, because on this day the divinity of Christ was revealed." In the third century, St. Hippolytus and Gregory the Neocaesarean take note of it. In the fourth century, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. John Chrysostom, St. Ambrose, and St. Augustine preached sermons on this day, calling it a great fast.

St. Andrew of Crete in the seventh century and St. John of Damasacus in the eighth composed beautiful hymns for it, which are used to the day in the services.

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!

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.

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.

Apollo 13 & St. Porphyrios

Some spiritual children of St. Porphyrios recounted to me the story that follows about the mission of Apollo 13. A Greek space-craft builder came to visit the Saint to receive his blessing because NASA had called the builder to travel urgently to the USA to help them with a serious problem that the crew of Apollo 13 was facing.

As a matter of fact, an oxygen tank had exploded and NASA could not bring the crew back to Earth. The whole project Apollo 13 was in danger, and NASA called space-builders from all over the world to assist in the effort to put them into orbit and bring them back. The Saint told him: "Just a moment . . . I can see the problem . . . You have to do this and that to bring it back. But when you experts gather there,

you will be the last to speak. You will let them all first make their suggestions, and you will tell them what should be done at the end of the meeting. They will not take you seriously at first, but this is the way they will manage to bring Apollo 13 back, and you will be awarded a prize for your contribution."

And that is exactly what happened in the end. The spaceship travelled in space for five days before the crew managed to repair the damage following the advice of the Greek space-craft builder. He was awarded a prize for his contribution.

What is amazing is the fact that the Saint had managed to "see" what exactly was wrong and how it should be repaired being himself 300,000 kilometers away from Apollo 13! *from ST. Porphyrios the Prophet: Witnesses, Volume 3 pp. 64-5.*

Greek scientist and engineer Anthony Kontaratos received NASA's Apollo Achievement Award in 1969 and was the engineer responsible for helping save the crew of the Apollo 13 mission.

St. Porphyrios Talking to Doctors

I remember that once some Medical Professors came to visit St. Porphyrios. I saw them looking surprised and listening to what the Saint was telling them. God illuminated him and he spoke using technical terminology about the future of medicine. He was talking to them about methods and procedures that were still unknown to them and had not been put into practice yet. For instance, he spoke to them about laparoscopy and the removal of stones for human organs without surgery. One of the professors reacted and told him:

"What are you talking about? These things are not written anywhere!"

"They are being written now, and you will find them in front of you. Just wait, and you will read them all! Listen to what I'm telling you . . ." *ibid. p. 86*

Upcoming Events 2023

- 31 December, 10:00 p.m. All-Night Vigil
- 5 January Forefeast of Theophany: Royal Hours, Vespers Liturgy, Vigil
- 6 January: Holy Theophany, Divine Liturgy, Great Blessing of Water
- 6 January: Blessing of Water at Meadowmere Park, Grapevine, TX 2:00 p.m.
- 21 January: Feast of St. Maximus

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!