

# The Confessor's Tongue for January 5, 2025

28<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost; Sunday Before Theophany; St. Synclética

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. 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 un**approachable**!

## January 5: St. Synclética

Saint Synclética (Synklētikē) was a native of Alexandria, the daughter of wealthy parents. She was very beautiful, but from a young age she thought only about the things which are pleasing to God. Loving the purity of virginity, she refused to marry anyone, and spent all her time in fasting and prayer.

After the death of her parents, Synclética distributed her inheritance to the poor. She left the city with her younger sister, and lived in a crypt for the rest of her life.

News of her ascetic deeds quickly spread throughout the region, and many devout women and girls came to live under her guidance. During the

course of her ascetical life the Saint zealously instructed the sisters by word and by deed.

In her eightieth year Saint Synclética was stricken with an intense and grievous illness. She bore her ordeal with true Christian endurance, and the day of her death was revealed to her in a vision. After giving final instructions to her nuns, she surrendered her soul to God around the year 350.

## From St. Synclética 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."

The holy Synclética said, "I think that for those living in community obedience is a greater virtue than chastity, however perfect. Chastity carries within it the danger of pride, but obedience has within it the promise of humility."

She also said, "It is dangerous for anyone to teach who has not first been trained in the practical life. For if someone who owns a ruined house receives guests there, he does them harm because of the dilapidation of his dwelling. It is the same in the case of someone who has not first built an interior dwelling; he causes loss to those who come. By words one may convert them to salvation, but by evil behaviour, one injures them."

## 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.

### Liturgical Changes

You may notice a few minor liturgical changes in weeks ahead.

The most noticeable will be to modify the translation of "Meet It Is" to "true Theotokos, we magnify thee. We have been singing or reading "verily, Theotokos, we magnify thee". In both Greek and Slavonic, however, the word is a present participle of the verb "to be" acting as an adjective modifying Theotokos. It is certainly not an adverb. "The one being Theotokos..." is a literal translation. "True Theotokos", while not strictly literal, well conveys the sense. It is sung thus in other parishes. I've long thought about making this change, and the New Year is a good time for it.

The Ninth Hour is appointed to be read before Vespers. We see this at the Presanctified Liturgy, but we haven't typically read it during the rest of the year. The Ninth Hour is the last service of the old liturgical day, Vespers the first service of the new. Hence, at the Ninth Hour, you'll hear the troparia and a kontakion for the calendar day; at Vespers you'll hear the service celebrating the saint of the next calendar

day. As at Liturgy, the Hour will provide a transition time from being in the world to starting Vespers.

The First Hour is appointed to come at the end of Matins, both daily and as part of Vigil. We typically do not read the First Hour, (except during Holy Week), having chosen to serve Matins more fully instead. On mornings when Matins is scheduled but there is no reader, the Priest often reads the Midnight Office and has begun to add the First Hour to it. We may also re-attach it to some of our Vigils.  
*Fr. Justin*

### 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 2024

- 6 January: Holy Theophany & Great Blessing of Water; house blessings begin.
- 20 January: Vigil for St. Maximus, 7:00 p.m.
- 21 January: Divine Liturgy for St. Maximus, 9:00 a.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!