

Saint Basil's News and Notes

January / February 2011



On Theophany: **By: Scott Cairns**

Today, January 6, Orthodox Christians celebrate another of the Twelve Great Feasts of the Christian Church -- the Theophany, or, as it is also called, the Epiphany. It is the day that Jesus is baptized in the River Jordan by the holy prophet and "forerunner" John, the day that Jesus of Nazareth, stepson of the aging carpenter Joseph, is revealed also to be the Christ, the Son of the eternal God.

That's pretty big talk, admittedly. Still, it is a vision that we are pleased to affirm, and (here's one additional mystery) it is something that by thus affirming we gradually come to behold. As with many beauties, this is apprehended only by those who are willing to see.

Early on, both the Nativity of Christ and the Theophany were celebrated on this same day, Jan. 6, but in the 4th Century the feasts were separated and the Christmas celebration was moved to December 25th, a day on which the pagans -- as Metropolitan Hierotheos has written -- "celebrated the sun god, and the Christians the Sun of Righteousness," the Light of the world.

Historically, the Forerunner John -- that famous wild man who lived on nuts and wild honey, and dressed in camel hair -- was in the habit of calling errant Jews to repentance, and a good many of them were pleased to receive his words. He also baptized them, as a performance of the new birth and new life to which they were committing themselves. While he was going about it, this same John was also in the habit of quoting Scripture, in particular the following passage from the Prophet Isaiah:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'

The four Evangelists' accounts of the event are found in Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, and John 1:32-34, and each of their stories goes pretty much like this passage according to Saint Matthew:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by You, and You are coming to me?' But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then John allowed Him.

This is when the story becomes very, very good. And, in case you had wondered, this is where our larger story also bears, for Orthodox Christians, both the revelation of Jesus as the Christ and the implication of the mystery at the center of our specifically Trinitarian Faith, alluding as it does to One God in Three Persons.

When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying 'This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.'

The troparion sung during our celebration of the feast indicates how we have come to appreciate this curious phenomenon:

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When You, O Lord were baptized in the Jordan. the worship of the Trinity was made manifest, For the voice of the Father bore witness to You, and called You His beloved Son. While the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the truthfulness of His word. O Christ, our God, You have revealed Yourself, and have enlightened the world, glory to You!

Perhaps of increased importance, as well -- and surely of some interest even to those who do not share our faith -- this is the Great Feast when our minds are most directed to the sanctification of the earth itself, and to the healing, the recovery of the stuff of our creation. This is when we celebrate what we call "The Great Blessing of the Waters."

Following further prophetic readings from Isaiah and the accounts of the Gospels, our priest plunges the holy cross into a basin of water, three times, each time entreating the Lord -- who blessed the waters of the Jordan by entering into it -- to hear our prayer:

Incline your ear and hear us, Lord, who accepted to be baptized in Jordan and to sanctify the waters, and bless us all, who signify our calling as servants by the bending of our necks. And count us worthy to be filled with your sanctification through the partaking and sprinkling of this water. And let it be for us, Lord, for healing of soul and body. For you are the sanctification of our souls and bodies, and to you we give glory, thanksgiving and worship, with your Father who is without beginning, and your All-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

We repeat, at this time, the troparion above, and follow that hymn with this brief, but rich kontakion: *Today You have shown forth to the world, O Lord, and the light of Your countenance has been marked on us. Knowing You, we sing Your praises. You have come and revealed Yourself, O unapproachable Light.*

I am often asked what it is that distinguishes early Eastern Christianity -- that is, Orthodoxy -- from most other expressions of the Christian Faith. My sense of that distinction is simple but profound: the Orthodox Church is all about healing, it is about the recovery of that divinity -- His very countenance -- that has been marked on us. Orthodoxy teaches us that this healing begins with the soul, extends to the body, and extends to all creation. We are not about spiritual transcendence of the material world, but about re-infusing that world with His Life-giving Spirit. This recovery is what is figured -- is physically performed -- by the particular baptism we celebrate today.

2011 Pledge and Membership Forms

At this, the beginning of a new year, we will be sending out pledge forms for 2011. All regular attendees will be receiving a letter explaining our current financial situation and a pledge card for the coming year.

As a new, small, mission, it is important that we consider the issue of stewardship carefully as part of our common life.

Please consider your individual circumstances as you make your commitment for 2011, and decide how you might be able to financially contribute to the work that St. Basil the Great Orthodox Church is doing in Wilmington, NC.

If you have any questions about pledges or membership, please see Father Peter.



A New Administrator for our Diocese ...

As “Administrator of the Diocese of the South,” Bishop Mark will be the primary episcopal contact for parishes and missions throughout the diocese.

Bishop Mark Maymon was born in New Albany, Indiana on June 22, 1958 and baptized in the Roman Catholic Church. After graduation from high school in 1976 he attended Indiana University South East before transferring to Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma from which he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1985. In 1987, he received a Master of Arts degree in Biblical Literature from Oral Roberts University where he accepted a position as Adjunct Professor of Old Testament. Introduced to Orthodox Christianity by Fr. George Eber and his professors of Church History, Bp. Mark was received into the Orthodox Church through Holy Chrismation in 1989. He then attended St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, New York, where in 1991 he earned a Master of Theology degree.

Bp. Mark was ordained a deacon by Bp. Antoun on August 17, 1997 and a priest on September 7, 1997 in the Antiochian Archdiocese. He served as pastor of St. John's Antiochian Orthodox Church in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania and then at St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan,

In 2004, he was elected bishop by the local synod of the Antiochian Archdiocese. On December 5, 2004, he was consecrated at the Patriarchal Cathedral in Damascus, Syria by Patr. Ignatius IV and other bishops. He was then enthroned diocesan bishop of the Diocese of Toledo and the Midwest at St. George Cathedral in Toledo, Ohio on August 25, 2005.

On December 13, 2010, Bishop Mark received a canonical release to the Orthodox Church in America.. His title, effective January 1, 2011, is Bishop of Baltimore, Auxiliary to the Metropolitan and Administrator of the Diocese of the South. In a letter from Metropolitan Philip to Metropolitan Jonah, Metropolitan Philip wrote that "Bishop Mark is a very good bishop and I am sure he will contribute his talents for the edification of the faithful of the Orthodox Church in America." His Grace will reside in Dallas and take up temporary residence at the Dallas home of Metropolitan Jonah.

Prosphora Bakers

We still need volunteers to bake bread for communion on an occasional basis.

Please see Father Peter if you are willing to learn this process. You are able to bake bread for several weeks worth of services at a time, so your commitment can be stretched, helping to spread the load.

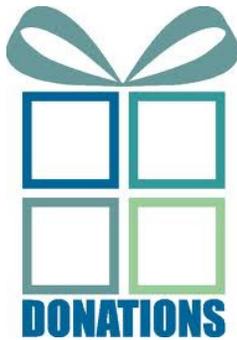
Prayer List

While Father Peter remembers the members of St. Basil's (and those who are suffering or ill that he is aware of) in prayer each week during Divine Services and on a regular basis, he would like to keep a running list of needs within the community (family members etc.) that he can use and share with the rest of the parish. Please email Father Peter with your requests to share.

House Blessings

In this season of Theophany, when we recognize the fact that our Lord has not only sanctified and redeemed us, as humans, but all of creation through his incarnation, we make this "blessing" real in our lives by offering ourselves, family, home and "all of our life" unto Christ our God through the practice of house blessings.

By asking the Lord's blessing upon our homes in this season of Theophany, we acknowledge the need to continually offer every aspect of our life to the service of our Lord, asking him to bless our endeavors and our lives as we struggle to live out our faith in a world that is riddled with sin and corruption.



Outreach and Charity ...

If the Church ceases to evangelize, to share the good news of the Gospel of our Lord, with those outside its walls, it ceases to be Church, for this is the essence of what it is to be the assembly of Christians, gathered in community. We exist not for the sake of self-preservation and help, but for the sake of those in need, and those to whom Christ must be offered.

To this end, St. Basil's will be placing a renewed emphasis on outreach and charity in 2011. Our collection for the youth outreach to the homeless in the fall (which had to be cancelled) was invested in supplies for care packages for the local homeless—our community will take these to those on the streets, sharing Christ with and getting to know those without a home of their own, after Vespers Services. We will continue this effort throughout the year.

Also, as a result of our 2010 "Nativity Appeal," we have collected in excess of \$1,300.00 that will be devoted to charitable causes only throughout the year. This fund will be increased as we reinstitute our monthly charity potlucks, enabling us to minister to "the least of these" within our midst.

Finally, we will be scheduling several community outreach events in 2011. Please keep your eyes out for announcements regarding these, and look for ways that you can volunteer to help make these events a success. Please continue to give generously, and volunteer when you are available to help us along this path toward being a self-sacrificing community.