

32nd Sunday After Pentecost

Circumcision of the Lord & St Basil the Great

1 / 14 January



Resurrection Tropar, Tone 7: By Thy Cross, Thou didst destroy death / to the Thief, Thou didst open Paradise / for the myrrh-bearers, Thou didst change weeping into joy! / and Thou didst command Thy disciples, O Christ God / to proclaim that Thou art risen / granting the world great mercy.

Troparion of the Feast tone 1: Thou who art by nature God didst without change take human form;/ O most compassionate Lord;/ and in fulfilling the Law, of Thine own will didst receive circumcision in the flesh,/ to banish shades and roll away the veil of our passions./ Glory to Thy goodness; glory to Thy compassion;/ glory to Thy

condescension, O Word.

Troparion of St Basil the Great tone 1: Thy fame has gone forth into all the earth,/ which has received thy word./ Thereby thou hast taught the Faith; thou hast revealed the nature of created things;/ thou hast made a royal priesthood of the ordered life of men./ Righteous Father Basil intercede with Christ our God/ that our souls may be saved.

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 7: The dominion of death can no longer hold men captive, / for Christ descended, shattering and destroying its powers. / Hell is bound, while the prophets rejoice and cry: / The Saviour has come to those in faith, / enter, you faithful to the Resurrection.

Kontakion of the Feast tone 3: In undergoing circumcision;/ the Lord of all has circumcised the sins of mortal men./ On this day He gives salvation to the world./ And the Hierarch Basil, the Creator's light-bearer/ and Christ's mystic, rejoices in the highest.

Kontakion of St Basil the Great tone 4: Thou wast an unshaken foundation of the Church and didst give to all mortals an inviolate lordship/ which thou didst seal with thy doctrine,/ O righteous Basil,/ revealer of the mysteries of heaven.

Matins Gospel X

for the Sunday before Theophany: II Tim 4:5-8

5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

I HAVE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

Often, when I have taken the Apostle into my hands, and have considered this passage, I have been at a loss to understand why Paul here speaks so loftily: I have fought the good fight. But now by the grace of God I seem to have found it out. For what purpose then does he speak thus? He is desirous to console the despondency of his disciple, and therefore bids him be of good cheer, since he was going to his crown, having finished all his work, and obtained a glorious end. You ought to rejoice, he says, not to grieve. And why? Because, I have fought the good fight. As a father whose son was sitting by him, bewailing his orphan state, might console him, saying, Weep not, my son; we have lived a good life, we have arrived at old age, and now we leave you. Our life has been irreproachable, we depart with glory, and you may be held in admiration for our actions. Our king is much indebted to us. As if he had said, We have raised trophies, we have conquered enemies, and this not boastfully. God forbid; but to raise up his dejected son, and to encourage him by his praises to bear firmly what had happened, to entertain good hopes, and not to think it a matter grievous to be borne. For sad, sad indeed is separation; and hear Paul himself, saying, We being bereaved of you for a short time, in presence, not in heart. (1 Thessalonians 2:17) If he then felt so much at being separated from his disciples, what do you think were the feelings of Timothy? If on parting from him while living he wept, so that Paul says, Being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy. (2 Timothy 1:4), how much more at his death? These things then he wrote to console him. Indeed the whole Epistle is full of consolation, and is a sort of Testament. I have fought the good fight, I

have finished my course, I have kept the faith. A good fight, he says, therefore do thou engage in it. But is that a good fight, where there are imprisonment, chains, and death? Yea, he says for it is fought in the cause of Christ, and great crowns are won in it. The good fight! There is no worthier than this contest. This crown is without end. This is not of olive leaves. It has not a human umpire. It has not men for spectators. The theater is crowded with Angels. There men labor many days, and suffer hardships, and for one hour they receive the crown, and immediately all the pleasure passes away. But here far otherwise, it continues for ever in brightness, glory, and honor. Henceforth we ought to rejoice. For I am entering on my rest, I am leaving the race. You have heard that it is better to depart and to be with Christ.

I have finished the course. For it behooves us both to contend and to run; to contend, by enduring afflictions firmly, and to run, not vainly, but to some good end. It is truly a good fight, not only delighting, but benefiting the spectator: and the race does not end in nothing. It is not a mere display of strength and of rivalry. It draws all up to heaven. This race is brighter than the sun's, yea, this which Paul ran upon earth, than that which he runs in heaven. And how had he finished his course? He traversed the whole world, beginning from Galilee and Arabia, and advancing to the extremities of the each, so that, as he says, From Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ. (Romans 15:19) He passed over the earth like a bird, or rather more swiftly than a bird: for a bird only flies over it, but he, having the wing of the Spirit, made his way through numberless impediments, dangers, deaths, and calamities, so that he was even fleeter than a bird. Had he been a mere bird, he might have alighted and been taken, but being upborne by the Spirit he soared above all snares, as a bird with a wing of fire.

St. John Chrysostom, Homily 9 on II Timothy

for Sunday: I Tim 1:15-17, for the Circumcision: Col 2:8-12

for the Sunday before Theophany: Mark 1:1-8

1. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You." 3 "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.'" 4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. 5 And all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. 8 "I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

There are three great beginnings in the life of Christ. The first two of those three, we celebrate in this single festal season - His birth and His baptism. With His birth we see the beginning of His earthly life, the fulfillment of the words of the Gospel of St John, "and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." In His baptism, we see the beginning of his earthly ministry and work, culminating in His death and Resurrection which complete our redemption. His Glorious Resurrection is the third great beginning for it is the founding of His immortal kingdom. Each of these beginnings was proclaimed by a herald: His birth by the heavens and the angelic host; His baptism by the Great Prophet Forerunner and Baptist John; His Resurrection by the Myrrh-bearing women. Today, as we stand on the threshold of His baptism, we see the coming of the herald of this event - John the Forerunner.

John was the one foretold by the prophets as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight". This John did by preaching repentance and baptizing for the remission of sins. The heart of the message of the Baptist is repentance for it is by means of repentance that we "make straight the way of the Lord" in our hearts and lives and it is by means of repentance that we are granted forgiveness of sins.

What then, is repentance and how does it accomplish these things in us? Repentance is more than just feeling sorry for our sins. Sorrow for our sins is a good thing - in fact from the beatitudes we just sang "Blessed are those who weep and mourn for they shall be comforted" - but sorrow by itself isn't enough; it doesn't constitute repentance. Notice that the beatitude itself tells us that the one who sorrows (i.e. "is sorry") will be comforted, but does not mention forgiveness. That sorrow for our sins does open the door to repentance because it is born out of a desire to draw near to God and the realization that we are so far from Him (and increasing that distance every moment by our own sins) When we see that we are far from God and that we ourselves do nothing more than exacerbate the

situation, then our response is sorrow. Depending on the strength of our love for God, we weep and mourn for our sin. In fact the ascetic fathers tell us that without tears we cannot truly repent. Sorrow for our sins leads us to repentance, but in order to truly repent, there must be something more than just feeling sorry.

Repentance begins with sorrow, but then it also encompasses the idea of “turning away”. To repent means to turn away from the things that we no longer desire to have in our lives. If I repent of my sins, that means that, in as much as it is in my power, I will turn my back on those sins and all the things that they entail. To fully repent means to purge my life not only of those things that are sins, but those things which lead up to sin and which result from it as well. Repentance is a total turning away from my old way of life that leads away from God and creates distance and taking on instead a new way of life that is in harmony with Him.

This aspect of repentance clarifies the call of the Forerunner to “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight” in my own life. By repenting, I reject the twists and turns away from the “straight and narrow” path of salvation. I make my own life “straight” so that I may more easily walk with the Lord on the path that He provides for us. By repenting I “deny myself” and my own ideas and thoughts about the spiritual life as well as my own judgments about what is good and evil and instead commit myself by faith to follow the path of salvation given by our Lord Jesus Christ. This path is laid out for us in the Gospel, in the life of the Church and demonstrated in the lives of the saints. This “straightening” is not our salvation, but it is the preparation to receive our salvation from He Who provides it.

John not only called for the people to make an interior decision to change their way of life, but he also called for outward actions to verify that way of life. It is not enough just to want to follow Christ in our lives; it is necessary to actually follow Him and that means action. John made use of a Hebrew ritual tradition by which a person who was unclean was made ritually clean by bathing. This ritual bathing was the baptism which John conferred “for the remission of sins.” He himself could not forgive sins (as the Gospel reminds us, only God can forgive sins), and so this baptism was not the same as the baptism of our Lord which does in fact cleanse us from our sins and is the means by which we are reborn. The baptism of John was a symbolic act indicating the decision and intent to repent from that moment forward. The link between repentance and this ritual baptism demonstrates for us the power of repentance – for it is by repenting and turning away from our sin that we are forgiven our sins by God. He sees the intent and desire of the heart to repent and He sees by our actions that we have indeed repented and He forgives us simply by reaching out His hand to us and bestowing upon us His grace which acts upon us to cleanse us from our former sins and strengthens us to follow through on our repentance.

This is the same thing that happens to us in the sacrament of confession. When we confess our sins, God Himself hears us and in His boundless compassion forgives our sins breaking the power that the sin has on us. He then bestows upon us His grace which acts to heal the wounds that sin has inflicted upon the soul and to strengthen us to resist the temptation that will surely come to return to that sin. In fact the tears of repentance that one sheds in the sacrament of confession are often likened by the ascetic fathers to a second baptism which washes the soul clean again.

Today we hear the cry of the Forerunner to “prepare the way of the Lord”. The means by which we do this in our lives is by repentance. When we repent, we turn our back on those things we see in our lives which lead us away from God – that is from our sins. It’s not merely regret or being sorry for what we have done, but a rejection of the way of life that brought about our sin as well as a rejection of the sin itself. Repentance means taking on a new way of life, a life that is in harmony with the life of Christ. Repentance also must be translated into action – it cannot just remain an inner intent or desire, but is something upon which we act. A genuine change in how we act and what we do and in our way of life is a necessary and vital component of true repentance. When God sees this repentance in us, He Himself reaches out to us and pours out upon us His grace of forgiveness which also enables and empowers us to follow Him. Having been baptized into Christ and having put on Christ, we are now cleansed and born anew. This is the start of our new life, our life in Christ brought about and maintained by repentance – it is the life to which we are called by the cry of the Forerunner to “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”

Archpriest David Moser
<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/propoved/info>

for the 31st Sunday: Luke 18:35-43, for the Circumcision: Luke 2:20-21,40-52

Saints of the week

1 / 14 January — The Circumcision of Our Lord Jesus Christ - Fast-free period - On the eighth day after His birth, the divine Child was taken to the Temple and duly circumcised according to the Jewish Law that had been observed from the time of Abraham. At this time He was given the name Jesus, the name announced to the most holy Virgin by the Archangel Gabriel (Luke 1:31). The Baptism of the New Covenant was prefigured in the Circumcision of the Old Covenant. The Lord's Circumcision shows that He took true human flesh upon Himself, not its semblance as heretics later taught of Him. The Lord was truly circumcised, desiring thus to fulfil all the Law, which He Himself had given through our forefathers and the prophets. Fulfilling all the ordinances of the Law, He superseded them by Baptism in His Church, for, as the Apostle declares: "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature"(Gal. 6:15). (In the Church Calendar, this Feast of the Lord has neither Forefeast nor Afterfeast.)

St Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea - was born in the reign of the Emperor Constantine, in about 330. While still unbaptised, he spent fifteen years in Athens studying philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy and other contemporary secular disciplines. Among his fellow-students were Gregory the Theologian and Julian, later the apostate emperor. When already of mature years, he was baptised in the Jordan together with his former tutor Evulios. He was Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia for nearly ten years, and died at the age of fifty. A great champion of Orthodoxy, a great torch of moral purity and zeal for the Faith, a great theological mind, a great builder and pillar of the Church of God, Basil fully deserved his title "the Great". In the Office for his Feast, he is referred to as a bee of the Church of Christ, bringing honey to the faithful but stinging those in heresy. Many of the writings of this Father of the Church have survived—theological, apologetic, on asceticism and on the Canons. There is also the Liturgy that bears his name. This Liturgy is celebrated ten times in the year: on January 1st, on the Eves of Christmas and the Theophany, on every Sunday in the Great Fast with the exception of Palm Sunday, and on the Thursday and Saturday in Great Week. St Basil departed this life peacefully on January 1st, 379, and entered into the Kingdom of Christ. Martyr-Prince Wistan of Mercia.

2 / 15 January —St Sylvester, Bishop of Rome - Fast-free period — - Born in Rome, he was skilled from his early years in secular learning and in Christian doctrine, and his life was always governed by the precepts of the Gospel. He made good use of the tuition of a priest, Timothy, whose death for the Faith he witnessed, and, seeing the example of his teacher's self-sacrifice, nourished himself in that same spirit for the rest of his life. He became Bishop of Rome at the age of thirty, and reformed certain Christian customs; abolishing, for example, the Saturday fast that had up to that time been the rule among some Christians, and decreeing that only Great Saturday and those Saturdays that fall within fasting seasons should be so observed. By his prayers and miracles, he was instrumental in the conversion and baptism of the Emperor Constantine and his mother, Helena, and assisted Queen Helena in the finding of the Holy Cross. He governed the Church for twenty years, and, finishing with honour his earthly life, entered into the heavenly Kingdom in the year 335.

Our Holy Father Seraphim of Sarov - He was one of the greatest Russian ascetics and wonderworkers, with profound spiritual discernment. Born in 1759, he departed this life in 1833. He was distinguished by a great humility. When being praised by all the world, he referred to himself as "the poor wretch Seraphim"; St Theodota; Our Holy Father Ammon of Tabennisi; in Wales,

St. Seiriol. - (born c.494) (*Latin-Serialanus, English-Serial*) St. Seiriol the Fair was a younger brother of Kings Cynlas of Rhos and Einion of Llyn. He entered the religious life and lived in a small hermitage on the Eastern Peninsula of Ynys Mon (Anglesey). His two ruling brothers later decided this humble residence was far too lowly for their Royal brother and founded an important monastery around his cell. Thus, Seiriol became the first Abbot of Penmon Priory. His hermitage and holy-well can still be seen there today. Seiriol became a great friend of St. Cybi who lived at Caer-Gybi on Ynys Cybi (Holy Island) on the far side of Ynys Mon (Anglesey). The two would often walk several miles to meet up for prayers at the Clorach Wells in Llandyfrydog in the centre of the island. This journey with his back to the sun allowed St. Seiriol's complexion to remain so fair that he was given the epithet of "Gwyn". In old age, Seiriol retired to Ynys Lannog (Priestholm), just off the coast from Penmon. It became known as Ynys Seiriol in his honour, though it is now better known as Puffin Island.

‡ **Scripture Readings - Matthew 11:27-30 (Matins Gospel); 1 Peter 2:21-3:9; Mark 12:13-17; Galatians 5:22-6:2 (Venerable); Luke 6:17-23 (Venerable)** ‡

3 / 16 January — The Prophet Malachi - Fast-free period — He was chronologically the last of the prophets, born after the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon in 538 B.C. He was unusually fair of face. According to folk-tradition, he was named 'the angel', perhaps because of his outward fairness, or because of his purity of spirit, or, again, perhaps, because of his companionship with an angel, with whom he often spoke face to face. At these times, others also heard its voice but were not worthy to look on its face. The young prophet spoke forth that which the angel revealed to him. He cried out against the ingratitude of Israel and the sins of the priests. Five hundred years before Christ, he clearly foretold the coming and work of St John the Baptist (3:7). But he was chiefly the prophet of the Day of Judgement (4:1-3). He went to God young in years, and after him there was no prophet in Israel until John the

Baptist.

The Holy Martyr Gordius - born in Caesarea of Cappadocia, he was an officer in the Roman army under the Emperor Licinius. At the outbreak of a terrible persecution, he left the army and his former rank and went into the Sinai desert. Alone on Mount Horeb, Gordius spent his time in prayer and in pondering the mysteries of heaven and earth. In particular he pondered on vanity and on the worthlessness of all for which people struggle and strive so on earth. He came finally to the desire to die and so move into that life that is without transience or corruptibility. With this desire, he went down into a town where pagan games were held. He presented himself to the governor as a Christian. The governor attempted in vain to turn him from the Faith with flattery and threats. Gordius remained unyielding and firm as diamond, saying: "It would obviously be an act of the greatest folly to trade this brief life for eternal torment and spiritual peril." Condemned to death, he hastened joyfully to the place of execution, speaking with the executioners on the way of the wonderful and sweet knowledge of Christ. With the name of Christ on his lips, he delivered his youthful body to the sword and his righteous soul to God in the year 320. St Genevieve; in County Derry, St. Finlugh, abbot.

St. Genevieve of Paris - Genevieve is the Patroness of the city of Paris. Through fasting, prayer and almsgiving she was made worthy of the Kingdom of God and died on January 3, 512 A.D., in the eighty-ninth year of her life.

‡ **Scripture Readings - 1 Peter 3:10-22; Mark 12:18-27; 2 Timothy 2:1-10 (Martyr); Matthew 10:16-22 (Martyr) ‡**

4 / 17 January — The Synaxis of the Seventy Apostles - Fast-free period — In addition to the twelve Great Apostles, the Lord chose besides seventy other, lesser, apostles and sent them to preach to the Jews. He sent them out two by two before His face, to each town and place, saying: "Behold, I send you as sheep among wolves" (Lk. 10:1-5). But as Judas, one of the Twelve, fell away from the Lord, so some among these Seventy withdrew from Him, not with the intention of betraying Him but from human weakness and lack of faith (Jn. 6:66). And as Judas's place was filled from among the other apostles, so the places of these were filled with others chosen. These apostles laboured in the same way as the twelve Great Apostles; they were the assistants of the Twelve in the spreading and strengthening of the Church of God in the world. They suffered much torture and malice, from men and from demons, but their firm faith and burning love for the risen Lord made them conquerors of the world and heirs of the Kingdom of heaven. St Eustathius, Archbishop of Serbia - born in the diocese of Budim, of God-fearing parents, he became a monk as a young man in Zeta, then moved on to greater asceticism at Hilandar. In time he became abbot of Hilandar, was then chosen to be Bishop of Zeta and, after some time had elapsed, to be Archbishop of Serbia. He was a man of great virtue and led Christ's flock with zeal and love. He entered peacefully into rest at a great age in 1279, exclaiming as death drew near: 'Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.' His relics are preserved in the crypt of the church at Pec.

The Eunuch of Queen Candace - The Apostle Philip baptised this negro eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). After his baptism, the eunuch returned home and began to teach about Christ. He was the first apostle of the Faith among the negroes of Ethiopia. He died a martyr and was counted worthy of the Kingdom of God. Our Holy Father, the Martyr Onuphrius of Hilandar.

‡ **Scripture Readings - 1 Peter 4:1-11; Mark 12:28-37; Romans 8:8-14 (Apostles); Luke 10:1-15 (Apostles) ‡**

5 / 18 January — Eve of Theophany — Fast Day - The Hieromartyr Theopemptus and the Holy Martyr Theonas - when the Emperor Diocletian gave orders for the persecution of Christians, Theopemptus, Bishop of Nicomedia, was the first to suffer for Christ. He was brought before the Emperor, who threatened him with death if he did not deny Christ. To that threat, the courageous bishop replied: 'It is written: "Fear not those who are able to kill the soul". You, O King, have power over my body. Do with it whatever you will!' He was cruelly beaten and starved, and tortured in many ways. Finally the Emperor called in a magician, Theonas, to trick the man of God in some way with magic. Theonas dissolved a very strong poison in water and gave it to Theopemptus to drink. Theopemptus made the sign of the Cross over the cup and drank the poison. Theonas, seeing that it had no effect on Theopemptus, turned to the Emperor and cried out: 'I too am a Christian, and worship the Crucified!' They were both condemned to death; Theopemptus was slain with the sword and Theonas buried alive in the year 298. They suffered with honour and became citizens of the Kingdom of Christ.

The Holy Prophet Micah the First (or Micaiah) - Micah was a contemporary of the Prophet Elias (9th century B.C.), and prophesied evil to King Ahab, who was killed in battle against the Syrians (I Kings 22:8; II Chron. 18:7). He prophesied entirely orally, writing nothing down. There was another Micah, in the eighth century, who prophesied the birth of the Lord in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2) and wrote one of the prophetic books. Our **Holy Mother Syncletica** - a native of Macedonia and educated in Alexandria, she was a rich young woman of standing. She had many suitors, but refused them all and fled from her

parents' home to a monastery. In the greatest self-denial, in vigils and prayer, she lived to the age of eighty. Her counsels to the nuns have always been regarded as true spiritual pearls, the wisdom she attained coming not from reading but through suffering and pain, through constant meditation and spiritual converse with the divine world. Her soul entered into that higher world in the year 350. Among other counsels, St Syncletica taught: 'Do not abandon a fast in time of sickness, for lo, those who do not fast fall into the same sicknesses.' Also: 'Treasure, when discovered, is quickly seized upon; so virtue, when it is made public, is quickly eclipsed and lost.' Our Holy Mother Apollinaria.

‡ **Scripture Readings - Acts 13:25-33; Matthew 3:1-11; Acts 19:1-8; Mark 1:1-8; Romans 6:3-11; Mark 1:9-15; Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7; Matthew 3:13-17; 1 Corinthians 9:19-27; Luke 3:1-18; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Mark 1:9-11 ‡**



6 / 19 January — The Theophany of Our Lord, God, & Saviour Jesus Christ (Baptism of the Lord) — When the Lord Jesus had lived for thirty years from His birth in the flesh, He began His teaching and saving work. He marked this very beginning of the beginning by His Baptism in the Jordan. St Cyril of Jerusalem says: 'The beginning of the world—water; the beginning of the Gospel—the Jordan.' At the Baptism of the Lord in the water, that mystery was revealed to the world that was predicted in the Old Testament and fabled in ancient Egypt and India—the mystery of the Holy Trinity of God. The Father revealed Himself to the sense of hearing, the Spirit to the sense of sight and the Son, further beyond these, to the sense of touch. The Father gave His testimony of the Son, the Son was baptised in the waters and the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, hovered over the waters. And when John the Baptist bore witness of Christ and said: 'Behold the Lamb of God,

which taketh away the sin of the world ' (Jn. 1:29), and when he immersed the Lord in the Jordan and baptised Him, there were thus revealed both the mission of Christ in the world and the path of our salvation. That is to say: Christ takes upon Himself the sin of the whole human race. He dies under it (the immersion) and rises again (the coming up out of the water), and we must die to the old, sinful man and rise again, cleansed, renewed and re-born. Here is the Saviour and here is the way of salvation. The Feast of the Theophany is also called the Illuminating, for in the Jordan there is given to us an illumining, revealing God to us as Trinity, consubstantial and undivided. That is one thing. And the other is that each of us baptised in the water is illumined by the Father of lights, through the merits of the Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

TODAY THE nature of the waters is sanctified. Today the Son of God is baptised in the waters of Jordan, having no need Himself of cleansing, but in order to cleanse the sinful human race from defilement. Now the heavens open and the voice of God the Father is heard: This is My beloved Son. The Holy Spirit descends upon the Saviour of the world, Who stands in the Jordan, thereby confirming that this indeed is He Who is the incarnate Son of God. The Holy Trinity is clearly made manifest and is revealed to mankind. The waters of the Jordan are sanctified, and together with them all the waters of creation, the very nature of water. Water is given power to cleanse not only the body, but also man's whole soul, and to regenerate the whole man unto a new life through Baptism. Through water all of nature is cleansed, for out of water the world was made, and moisture penetrates everywhere, giving life to everything else in nature. Without moisture neither animals nor plants can live; moisture penetrates into rocks, into every place in the world. The waters are sanctified and through them the whole world, in preparation for renewal and regeneration for God's eternal Kingdom which is to come.

Every year on this day the glory of God is revealed, renewing and confirming what was accomplished at Christ's Baptism. Again the heavens are opened; again the Holy Spirit descends. We do not see this with our bodily eyes, but we sense its power. At the rite of blessing, the waters which are thereby sanctified are transformed; they become incorruptible and retain their freshness for many years. Everyone can see this—both believers and unbelievers, both the wise and the ignorant. Whence do the waters acquire this property? It is the action of the Holy Spirit.

Those who with faith drink these waters and anoint themselves with them receive relief and healing from spiritual and bodily infirmities. Homes are sanctified by these waters, the power of demons is expelled, God's blessing is brought down upon all that is sprinkled with these waters. Through the sanctifying of the waters God's blessing is again imparted to the whole world, cleansing it from the sins we have committed and guarding it from the machinations of the devil.

Today the Holy Spirit, descending upon the waters when the Cross of Christ is immersed into them, descends upon all of nature. Only into man He cannot enter without his will. Let us open our hearts and souls to receive Him and with faith cry from the depth of our souls: "Great art Thou, O Lord, and marvellous are Thy works, and there is no word which sufficeth to hymn Thy wonders."

Man of God, St. John of Shanghai & San Francisco, p.163

‡ **Scripture Readings - Mark 1:9-11 (Matins Gospel); Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7; Matthew 3:13-17; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Mark 1:9-11‡**

7 / 20 January — Afterfeast of Theophany - Synaxis for the Holy, Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist, John — John's greatest role during his life was enacted on the day of the Theophany, and because of this the Church has, from the earliest times, dedicated the day following that feast to his memory. This day is also connected with an event involving the hand of the Forerunner. The Evangelist Luke desired to take John's body from Sebaste, where the great prophet had been beheaded by Herod, to Antioch, his own birthplace. He succeeded, though, in acquiring and taking only one hand, which was kept in Antioch till the tenth century. It was then moved to Constantinople, whence it disappeared during the Turkish occupation. (It is related that each year, on his feast-day, the archbishop would bring it out before the people. Sometimes the hand appeared open, and sometimes clenched. In the first case it indicated that it would be a fertile year, and in the second that it would be a year of famine.) St John is commemorated several times during the year, but his greatest feast is on this day, January 7th. Among the Gospel-figures surrounding the Saviour, the person of John the Baptist holds a very special place, by the manner of his birth in this world and of his earthly life, by his role of baptiser of men to repentance and his baptism of the Messiah, and, lastly, by the tragic manner of his departure from this world. He was of such moral purity that he indeed deserved the name 'angel', as he was named in the Scriptures, rather than being thought of as just a mortal man. John differs from all the other prophets in that he had the joy of showing forth to the world the One Whom he had foretold.

Tropar of St. John the Baptist (Tone 2): The memory of the just is praised, but thou art well pleased, O Forerunner, with the testimony of the Lord. For thou hast verily been shown forth as more honoured than the prophets, since thou wast counted worthy to baptise in the stream Him whom they foretold. Therefore, having mightily contended and suffered for the truth, with joy thou hast preached also to those in hell the good tidings of God made manifest in the flesh, who takes away the sin of the world and grants us great mercy. The Holy Martyr Athanasius; St. Cedd of Lastingham, bishop of the East Saxons (664); St. Brannoch (Brynach) of Braunton (6th c).

‡ **Scripture Readings - 2 Timothy 2:11-19; Luke 18:2-8; Acts 19:1-8 (Forerunner); John 1:29-34 (Forerunner); Ephesians 6:10-17; Matthew 4:1-11** ‡

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

SAINT BASIL THE GREAT

You, Who, gave the Law to the world and to man,
You, the Law-giver, placed Yourself under the Law,
Others, you enjoined by imposition - Yourself, voluntarily.
That is why on the eighth day, in the flesh, You were circumcised.
In fulfilling the Law, with a new one You replaced it:
Circumcision of the flesh, was replaced with a spiritual one.
That impure passions we cut off from ourselves
And with a spirit pure, to gaze upon You.
That, with the spirit, the will of the body to cut and to constrict,
Your will, O Savior, by the spirit we fulfill it -
To this circumcision, the saints learned,
Their fiery example, to us, they left.
Wonderful Basil, to a glowing ray, similar,
To such circumcision, generations, he teaches.
To Basil, be glory, Your servant, great
Great, because of You, humble and constrained He became.
That is why he became great, and Great,
He remained.

REFLECTION

Why is it necessary to listen to the Church and not listen to one man who thinks against the Church, even though he might be called the greatest thinker? Because the Church was founded by the Lord Jesus Christ, and because the Church is guided under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. Because the Church represents the realm of the Holy, a grove of cultivated fruit trees. If one rises up against the realm of the

Holy, it means that he is unholy and why then listen to him? "The Church is an enclosure," says the all-wise John Chrysostom. "If you are within, the wolf does not enter; but if you leave, the beasts will seize you. Do not distance yourself from the Church; there is nothing mightier than the Church. The Church is your hope. The Church is your salvation. The Church is higher than the heavens. The Church is harder than stone. The Church is wider than the world. The Church never grows old but always renews itself."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Circumcision of the Lord Jesus Christ: 1. His glory in the heavenly kingdom where Cherubims serve Him in fear and in trembling; 2. His lowliness and His humility in the ritual of circumcision intended for sinners; 3. To contemplate my heart: how much have I circumcised sinful thoughts, vices and passions from it.

HOMILY

About how we should depart from evil and do good

"Turn from evil, and do good" (Psalm 34:15)

With these words are expressed all our effort by which we should labour here on earth and in the earth, i.e., on this material earth and in this physical body. Therefore, of what then should our labour consist? To achieve two habits: First, to avoid evil and Second, to do good. Concerning that which is good and that which is evil, our conscience tells us incompletely and unclearly because our conscience is darkened by sin; but the teaching of Christ tells us completely and clearly that which is good and that which is evil.

Brethren, what does our Lord ask of us? He asks, that as our altars are always facing the east, so should our souls also be turned toward good. To leave evil behind us; to leave evil in the shadow; to leave evil in the abyss of oblivion; to leave evil in the darkness of the past, that we, from year to year, from day to day, extend ourselves toward good: to think about good; to yearn for good; to speak about good; to do good. The Lord is seeking builders and not destroyers. For whoever builds good, with that alone, he destroys evil. However, he who turns away from destroying evil, quickly forgets how to build good and is transformed into an evildoer.

The apostle of Christ teaches us, "Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good" (Romans 12:9). Hate evil but do not hate the man who commits evil for he is sick. If you can, heal the sick person but do not kill him with your hatred. Adhere to good and only good; for good is from God; for God is the treasury of all good.

O Good and All-good Lord, teach us to avoid evil and to do good for the sake of Your glory and for the sake of our salvation.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

Words of Wisdom

In the spiritual life, New Year's Day is when one who has been living carelessly becomes zealous about salvation and pleasing God. When one makes this resolution, then all is rebuilt afresh both internally and externally, upon new beginnings--the old passes away and all is new. If you have this, renew it; if not, acquire it--and for you this will be New Year's Day.

A worthy celebration of the Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord and of the commemoration of St. Basil the Great is also connected with this. The essence of the change we have mentioned is that a person begins from this moment to live solely for his salvation, for God; whereas previously he lived exclusively for himself, preparing destruction for himself. Now he abandons former habits, all comforts, and all in which he found pleasure.

He cuts off passions and lustful dispositions and takes on works of strict self-denial. Such a change precisely represents that which, according to the Apostle, the circumcision of the heart should be.

The celebration of the Circumcision of the Lord reminds us of this and obligates us to do it, while St. Basil the Great provides us with an example to follow. So all the themes which crowd our consciousness on New Year's Day come together into one our inner renewal through the circumcision of the heart. If it pleases the Lord to give someone this mind-set on New Year's Day- that is, not only to think in such a way, but also to bring all of this into his life -he will celebrate New Year's Day in a most perfect Christian manner, and will prepare for a Christian passage of the whole year. On the subsequent New Year's Day he will only have to renew and enliven what he has now taken on.

St. Theophan the Recluse

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