



CHURCH of the LIFE-GIVING FOUNTAIN
“ZOODOCHOS PEGHE”
GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA
ΙΕΡΑ ΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΗ ΑΜΕΡΙΚΗΣ
314 North Fifth Street Martins Ferry, OH 43935
Telephone: (740) 633-3707

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

We come to the start of the New Year according to the civil calendar. We begin in the midst of the twelve days of Christmas and greet the Feast of Theophany. Christ is baptized and blesses the waters of the Jordan, and thus blesses the whole world. On January 6th we will bless Holy Water and with that water I will come to bless your homes and businesses, your whole life. Please contact me or the parish council members to let me know the best time to visit you. As I visited last January, I found that it was many years since some homes had been blessed. Let us all take advantage of this opportunity to invite God into our homes in this season. It is a simple thing, but simple things can have significance.

We have had last month our first Parish General Assembly in some time. As soon as the Metropolitan formally ratifies our new Parish Council we will formally “swear them in” to serve our community. It has been a while since the parish was formally so well set. The parish has come through the year just past quite well. We can rightfully be cautiously optimistic about the future. Financially we broke even these last two years. That is better than many larger parishes can say. There is not much surplus. Our parish lives rather day-to-day. Glory to God. “The Lord said to Moses, ‘I will send bread down from heaven like rain. Each day the people can go out and gather only enough for that day. That’s how I will see if they obey me.’” It would of course be reassuring if we had financial abundance. But neither the Bible nor experience do not teach us to rely on such things. Better to find joy in enough than chase abundance. Who can say that Christmas was so much less joyful before every child had to have six or sixteen electronic toys? I am very thankful that our small parish has just enough. Certainly there are needs. I

expect, Lord permitting, that the Metropolitan will keep me here to serve you for several years. But in that time the parish must learn to prosper in such a way as to be ready to support an ordinary priest with a family and the ordinary needs that such a priest with family will have. That will easily happen when we as a community grow as Christians.

The way for our parish to prosper and grow is that each of us first individually and then as a community turn to God and live His Life. It starts in our hearts. Let us choose to be all that we can be, the Christ calls us to be.

The Divine Liturgy is long, and sometimes uninteresting, unless we love God and find Him in that Liturgy. There are many things that pull at us and distract us from God as revealed in our Church. That is only because we have neglected our faith, our Christian life. Without God, nothing else will satisfy, no matter how much we have. Without God, no matter how much we give, it will never be enough. It's not just what we do but why we do it. We know that from our families.

Let us start into the New Year with hope and trust in God. We will celebrate the Great Blessing of Holy Water on January 6th in the parish, and then join Fr. Demetrius and the Wheeling community for the Blessing of the Ohio River. On Sunday, January 10th we will have a small Blessing of Holy Water after the Liturgy. The 40th Day Churching of a mother and her new-born child the Sunday before is a good start to the year.

May the Lord set His Angels around us all this year.

Fr. Michael



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God is Glorious in His Saints

January is full of wonderful saints.

On January 1st we remember St. Basil the Great. On this day we bless St. Basil Bread, Vasilopita.

On January 2nd we remember St. Seraphim of Sarov, who prayed on a stone day and night for 3 years, fed a bear from his hand, and demonstrated a pilgrim the experience of the Uncreated Light. St. Seraphim said, “Acquire the Holy Spirit, and a thousand around you will be saved.”

On January 6th we celebrate Theophany, Christ’s Baptism in the River Jordan, and then on the 7th we remember St. John the Baptist.

On January 17th we remember St. Anthony, the father of monks. St. Anthony lived in Egypt in the early 4th century. He died in 356, the year that young St. Basil visited Egypt to learn from the monks there.

On January 20th we remember St. Euthymios the Great, monk of Palestine. He is part of the origin of the Lenten fast. Each year after Theophany he would leave his monastery and cross the Jordan River to pray in solitude until Palm Sunday when he returned to celebrate Holy Week in the community. During that time in the wilderness he subsisted on only whatever he found growing wild and whatever water he might find. This became a model as the Church developed the liturgical celebration and the preparation of catechumens for baptism at Easter. St. Euthymios died in 473.

On January 25 we remember St. Gregory the Theologian. St. Gregory was a close friend of St. Basil. St. Gregory’s Pascha Homily became the basis for many of the hymns sung in Holy Week and Pascha.

On January 30th we remember the Three Hierarchs: Sts. Basil, John Chrysostom and Gregory the Theologian.



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Theophany is, for Orthodox Christians, the Feast of Baptism of Christ. It is also called in Greek, *Ta Phota*, the Lights. (Thus it is the Nameday of those named Fani and Photini.) As the Kontakion of the Feast says, “Today Thou hast appeared to the universe, and Thy Light, O Lord, has shone on us, who with understanding praise Thee: Thou hast come and revealed Thyself, O Light Unapproachable”. It is the closure of the “twelve days” of Christmas. Traditionally, Advent, the period of preparation before the Nativity of Christ, Christmas, was a quiet time of preparation. Then the twelve days from December 25th to January 6th were the days of festive celebration, as is remembered in the popular song. Today the, may I say hysteria of, commercial consumerism have largely pushed that sensibility aside. Who remembers the significance of that verse, “On the twelfth day of Christmas my true Love gave to me ...”? With the Baptism in the Jordan River, God is shone forth to the world – the literal meaning of the word Theophany. The more familiar English word Epiphany has much the same meaning.

Theophany was one of the ancient traditional days for receiving new members into the Church, together with Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. All through the year at the Divine Liturgy we chant the usual Trisagion, “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us”. But on these four Feasts we chant instead, “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, Alleluia”. This is also sung at every baptism. The hymn is sung on these days because these were the traditional days for baptisms. On the day after Theophany the Church celebrates St. John the Forerunner because he was the one who baptized Christ.

The Church sings: At Your Epiphany at the River Jordan, O Christ, when You were baptized by the Forerunner, O Savior, the voice from heaven testified that You are the beloved Son. Therefore You were shown to be with the father beginningless, and the Holy Spirit came down like a dove and alighted on You. In Him we are illumined and cry out, Glory to God in the Trinity.

This is a very important Feast because in it we have the clear revelation of the Trinity: God the Logos, the Word, the Son in the person of Jesus, God the Father in the Voice from heaven and God the Holy Spirit in the form of the Dove.

Baptism is our entrance into the Church, into the Body of Christ. Many people, when they think of baptism think of forgiveness for original sin. What does that mean? If we mean forgiveness of guilt that requires a penalty, this is not really an Orthodox understanding. In the Latin church and thus in most of Protestantism, sin is understood primarily as the breaking of a law and the legal penalty that is appropriate to that guilt. This idea is due primarily to Augustine of Hippo, an influential Latin theologian who was first a lawyer, so he read everything in the scripture from the perspective of a lawyer and saw guilt as the basic issue. Later Anselm of Canterbury built on that until the idea developed that humanity is basically evil and guilty for Adam's breaking of the original commandment.

The Orthodox Fathers never were so one-sided. Indeed there is legal and sacrificial imagery in scripture, and one cannot be a Christian and ignore it. But most of Christ's teaching and parables were about healing. Humanity is injured and weakened and needs to be healed.

As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ, been clothed in Christ (Galatians 3:27). When the priest blesses the water for baptism he prays: "... Come now through the descent of your Holy Spirit and sanctify this water. Grant to it the grace of redemption,, the blessing of Jordan. Make a fountain of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a remover of sins, a protection against infirmities, a destroyer of demons, unassailable by hostile powers, filled with angelic strength. Let all who plot against your creature flee from it; for I have called upon your name, O Lord, which is wonderful and glorious and terrible to your enemies." Then the one to be baptized is anointed with the oil of gladness in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit before being immersed in the water. It is very important the Orthodox baptism is, normally, done by immersing fully in the water. Symbolically we die and are buried with Christ so that as we come up out of the water we rise with Christ to eternal life. Not just a sprinkling or pouring, not just a washing of sins but a New Life.

And then the Orthodox always continue immediately to Anointing with the Chrism, the Myron, the oil that has been blessed by the Patriarch and the bishops together as the "Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit". The culmination of all this is receiving Holy Communion in the Body and Blood of Christ. For this reason the baptism was traditionally done as part of the Divine Liturgy, one initiation into the Body of Christ.

"The aim of Christian life is to return to that perfect grace of the most holy and life-giving Spirit, which is originally conferred upon us through divine baptism" – Sts Ignatius and Kallistos Xantopoulos

"Do you have an infant child? Do not let sin get any opportunity, but let him be sanctified from his childhood; from his very tenderest age let him be consecrated by the Spirit." St. Gregory the Theologian

Metropolitan Savas at ordination of Fr. Anastasios Athanasiou

The fact that you were so careful to name people in community, in this congregation, around this altar, to name people to whom you are indebted, for love, prayer, for friendship, for support, speaks to your character and demonstrates to me that you are a Eucharistic person. A person of thanksgiving. A person who knows that what he has in life is not what he has earned in life but what he has been given. And that he is grateful for the gifts and the relationships. And here we are on the threshold of the national feast of thanksgiving when we conduct an exercise of putting together a list of the things that we are grateful for. That ought not to be a single act but rather our way of being.

We know that we are Eucharistic beings ourselves. That's what we come to do every time we gather around this table to celebrate the Eucharist. We celebrate a Thanksgiving. If you did a word count of the Liturgy, after the words God and Jesus and mercy and all that, you find thank you, thank you, thank you. And that's as it should be; that's what we're here to do. To appreciate the connectedness of our lives and our relationships. This is not a congregation of individual. This is a congregation of people who are part of each other. Whether by blood: fathers, sons, mothers, daughters. Or by the blood of Christ. We are all members of the Body of Christ. When one suffers, all suffer. When one rejoices, all rejoice. Today we rejoice in you. We rejoice that God has brought to maturity, to a state of readiness, yet another man.

You're right. You have been prepared in certain ways. You've been taught dogma and church history and liturgics – how we do and what we do and why we do. You know the rubrics; you know the liturgy. Now you need to learn the life. You'll learn the life by the liturgy. And the gift that cannot be taught is discernment. How to walk. When to be strict and when to be lenient. When to require justice and when to be a source of mercy. And I would pray that you, as one of my priests, err on the side of mercy. St. Ambrose, one of the great early fathers of the church, was a rather irregular father. An enormously brilliant, profound man, and his gifts were recognized by his people, even when he was not yet a Christian. He was proclaimed bishop by acclamation when he was not yet baptized. So he was brought into the church in short order, and became a bishop in a matter of days. He was aware that everything that happened to him was an act of God's mercy. He said, "Where mercy is, God is. Where severity is, there are only His ministers" – taking a little dig at his overzealous clergy who were more bound by the law than living in the Spirit. So if you have to err on one side or the other, err on the side of mercy. You've not been given these people to whip into shape but to love into shape. And of course if you have any question of which to choose, I've entrusted you to a priest of great discernment and long experience, Fr. James. And if he can't guide you, you have your chancellor. And if he can't guide you ... and if I can't guide you, God will suffice.



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The Earth is the Lord's

From the Great Blessing of Holy Water on Theophany

The voice of the Lord upon the waters cries out, saying, 'Come all of you, receive the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of the fear of God, of Christ who has appeared'.

Today the nature of the waters is made holy, and Jordan is parted and holds back the flow of its waters as it sees the Master washing himself.

As man, Christ King, you came to the river, and in your goodness you hasten to accept the baptism of a servant at the hands of the Forerunner, on account of our sins, O Lover of mankind.

The Reading is from the Prophecy of Isaias.

[55,1-13]

Thus says the Lord: You that thirst, go for water. And as many of you as have no money, make your way and buy. And eat and drink wine and fat without money and price. Why do you spend money on what is not food, and toil for what does not satisfy? Hear me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in good things. ... But when the Lord comes near you, let the impious abandon his ways and a lawless man his plans. And return to the Lord and you will find mercy, and cry out, for he will abundantly forgive your sins. For my plans are not like your plans, nor are my ways like your ways, says the Lord. For as rain or snow comes down from heaven and does not return until it has saturated the earth and it brings forth and sprouts and gives seed to the sower and bread for food, so will my word be. Whatever comes out of my mouth will not return to me empty, until everything that I wished has been fulfilled. And I

will make my ways and my commands prosper. You will go out with gladness and be taught with joy. For the mountains and hills will leap up, welcoming you with joy, and all the trees of the field will clap with their branches.

For there to come down upon these waters the cleansing operation of the Trinity beyond all being, let us pray to the Lord.

For there to be given them the grace of redemption, the blessing of Jordan, let us pray to the Lord.

For us to be enlightened with the enlightenment of knowledge and true religion through the visitation of the Holy Spirit, let us pray to the Lord.

For this water to become a gift of sanctification, a deliverance from sins, for healing of soul and body and for every suitable purpose, let us pray to the Lord.

For this water to become water springing up to eternal life, let us pray to the Lord.

Great are you, O Lord, and wonderful your works, and no word is adequate to sing the praise of your wonders (x3).

Therefore, O King, lover of mankind, be present now too through the visitation of your Holy Spirit, and sanctify this water. (x3)

As you were baptised in the Jordan, Lord, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest, for the voice of the Father bore witness to you, naming you the Beloved Son; and the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the sureness of the word. Christ God, who appeared and enlightened the world, glory to you.

Because God is love, one realizes that the greatest blessings are the trials, not the easy things The way of Orthodoxy is filled with difficulties and crosses, but it yields you to the path wherein you glorify God for all things and are thankful for all things – the Resurrection. Abbot Vasilios of Iveron Monastery