



CHURCH of the LIFE-GIVING FOUNTAIN
"ZODOCHOS 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. 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.

The parish has come through the year just past quite well. We can rightfully be cautiously optimistic about the future. We lost some well-loved members this last year. Especially we miss Chris Pashalis and Ethel Augoustides who have left empty places in our pews and Michelle Mullen who did not live locally but whose family are firm members of our local community. 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 teach us to rely on such things. Better to find joy in enough than chase surplus. 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 Friday, January 6th in the parish, and then join Fr. Demetrius and the Wheeling community for the Blessing of the Ohio River.

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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Holy Water

The Orthodox Church recognizes countless ways in which God pours His grace upon us and our world. This is seen, for example, in the many blessings of water and blessing with water. Whereas the Catholic Church defines seven sacraments, and Holy Water is not among them, the Orthodox Church has been less concerned with defining and prefers to rejoice in God's grace.

On January 6th the Church commemorates and celebrates Theophany, the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan River. Christ enters the water of the Jordan and thus blesses the water of the river, blesses all water and blesses the whole world. We remember this in the prayers blessing the water of baptism.

“Do You Yourself, O Loving King, be present now also through the descent of Your Holy Spirit and hallow this water. Give to it the Grace of Redemption, the blessing of the Jordan. Make it a fountain of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a loosing of sins, a healing of sicknesses, a destruction of demons, unapproachable by hostile powers, filled with angelic might; and let them that take counsel together against Your creature flee there from, for I have called upon Your Name, O Lord, which is wonderful, and glorious, and terrible to adversaries.”

Not merely a cleansing from sin, although that is certainly important, but a water of new birth and life.

On Theophany we celebrate the Great Blessing of Holy Water. This is done twice, on the Feastday, January 6th, and because in earlier times there were such crowds that could not attend this blessing, the same blessing was also instituted on January 5th. It is the same service, the same blessing, the same water, only provided at this alternate time. With the Holy Water of the Great Blessing we bless the faithful, our homes, our business or fields, the whole world.

The Great Blessing of Holy Water is always done in conjunction with the Divine Liturgy. There is also the Small Blessing of Holy Water. This is a separate service which is not connected with a Divine Liturgy. Instead of the hymns of Theophany there is a long series of verses to the Theotokos. The prayers of blessing are different. It is called for on the Procession of the Holy Cross on August 1st, on the Feast of the Life-Giving fountain of Bright Friday and on Mid-Pentecost. Indeed, this blessing may be done at any time of the year and not necessarily in a church. It may, for example be done in homes.

There is also a brief Blessing of Holy Water which is done out-of-doors. It is this service that will be used at the Blessing of the Ohio River on January 6th in Wheeling and Shadyside.

The Lord blesses us and our world. May we also bless the Name of the Lord in our lives.



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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.

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)

At Your Baptism in the Jordan, O 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 truth of the word. Christ God, who appeared and enlightened the world, glory to you.



Blessing of the Ohio River January 6th 2017
