

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church
A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese
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*An excerpt from
a meditation by
a monk of the
Eastern Church*

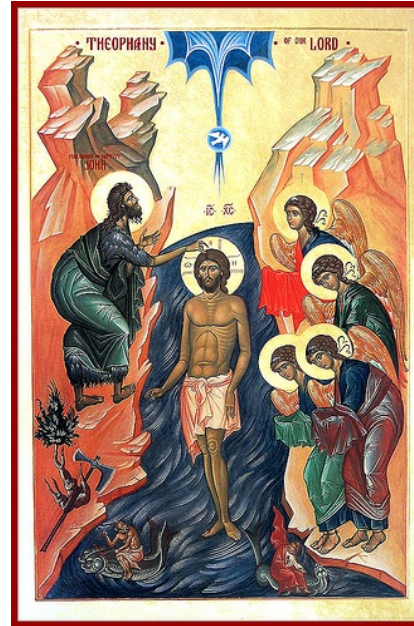
Epiphany is the first public manifestation of Christ. At the time of his birth, our Lord was revealed to a few privileged people. Today, all those who surround John, that is to say his own disciples and the crowd that has

come to the banks of the Jordan, witness a more solemn manifestation of Jesus Christ. What does this manifestation consist of? It is made up of two aspects. On the one hand, there is the aspect of humility represented by the baptism to which our Lord submits: on the other hand, there is the aspect of glory represented by the human witness that the Precursor bears to Jesus, and, on an infinitely higher plane the divine witness which the Father and the Spirit bear to the Son...

Let us bear this in mind: every manifestation of Jesus Christ, both in history and in the inner life of each man, is

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simultaneously a manifestation of humility and of glory. Whoever tries to separate these two aspects of Christ commits an error which falsifies the whole of spiritual life. I cannot approach the glorified Christ without, at the same time, approaching the humiliated Christ, nor the humiliated Christ without approaching the glorified Christ. If I desire Christ to be manifested in me, in my life, this cannot come about except through embracing him whom Augustine delighted to call *Christus humilis*, and, in the same upsurge,

worshiping him who is also God, King, and Conqueror. This is the first lesson of Epiphany.

The aspect of humility in Epiphany consists of the fact that Our Lord submits to John's baptism of repentance... Obviously Jesus had no need to be purified by John, but this baptism conferred by the Precursor, this baptism for the remission of sins, was a preparation for the messianic kingdom; and Jesus, before proclaiming the coming of this kingdom wished to go through all those preparatory phases which he himself was to "consummate". Being himself the fulness, he wished to take into himself all that was still incomplete and unfinished.

But, in receiving the Johannine baptism, Jesus did more than solemnly approve and confirm a rite before transforming it - more than consummate the imperfect into the perfect. He who was without sin made himself the bearer of all our sins, of the sin of the whole world; and it is in the name of all sinners that Jesus made a public act of repentance. Moreover, Jesus wished to teach us the

necessity of penitence and conversion; before we can draw near to Christian baptism itself, we must receive John's baptism; that means we have to go through a change of spirit, through an inner catastrophe. We must experience real contrition for our sinfulness. As far as we ourselves are concerned, repentance is the aspect of humility in Epiphany.

And here we must remind ourselves that we have been baptized in Christ. Christian baptism has washed and purified us. It has abolished original sin in us and made a new creature of us. We were probably infants when we were baptized; baptismal grace was then a divine response, not to our personal request, but to the faith of those who brought us to baptism and also to the faith of the whole Church when it accepted us. This baptismal grace was, then, in some way provisional and conditional: it needed us, of our own free choice as we grew up and became conscious, to confirm the act of our baptism. Epiphany is, above all, the feast of baptism, not only of Jesus' baptism, but also of our own. It is a wonderful opportunity for us to renew in spirit the baptism that we received, and to revive the grace which was conferred on us. For the sacramental graces, even if interrupted and suspended by sin, can become alive in us again, if we turn sincerely to God.

At this feast of Epiphany, let us ask God to wash us again - spiritually, not actually - in the waters of baptism; let us drown the old, the sinful, creature in them, for baptism is a mystical death; let us cross the Red Sea which separates captivity from freedom and let us immerse ourselves with Jesus in the Jordan to be washed not by the Precursor, but by Jesus himself.

The glorious aspect of Epiphany consists of the two testimonies solemnly given to Jesus. There was John's testimony and there was the divine testimony of the Father and of the Spirit. The testimony of the Father was the voice that came from heaven and said: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* The testimony of the Spirit was the descent of the dove: *The Spirit of*

God descending like a dove. This is Jesus' true baptism. The word spoken by the Father and the descent of the dove are more important than the baptism by water that John conferred on Jesus. The baptism by water was but an introduction to this divine manifestation... From the time of Jesus' baptism, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all three revealed to the world; the Father and the Spirit are revealed in the relationship of love which unites them to the Son... Jesus is not truly manifested to us unless we perceive something of this divine intimacy, and unless, inwardly, we hear the voice of the Father: *This is my beloved Son* and see the flight of the dove lighting upon the head of the Savior. Only on this condition will the feast of Epiphany be a true Epiphany, the manifestation of Christ. Our devotion must, in the Son, reach to the Father and the Spirit.

St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Feast Day ~ January 28*



As we so often hear in church, what God expects of us is faithfulness: faithfulness to his word as laid out in Holy Scripture and the teachings of the Church, faithfulness in repentance and sorrow for our sins, faithfulness in worship and receiving the sacraments. Whether the circumstances of our lives bring us peace and tranquility or turmoil, pain, and sorrow, we are to remain faithful to God in order to be received into his everlasting Kingdom.

One of the saints whom the Church holds up for our veneration and who demonstrates this faithfulness is St. Ephrem the Syrian, who died in the year 373.

Ephrem is held in high regard by scholars in several disciplines. His poetry in the Syriac language is considered by many to be the best of its type; it has been thoroughly studied by linguists and has been translated over the centuries into many other languages. Historians also benefit from references in his poems, prose works, and letters that corroborate events at the crossroads of the Roman and Persian empires in the fourth century. Theologians marvel at the ways in which Ephrem was able to express ideas concerning God in the symbolic and poetic language that he used. But for most of us, it is Ephrem's faithfulness through many challenges that brings us to venerate him as a saint.

We learn through his own words that Ephrem was the child of Christian parents, born in the city of Nisibis on the edge of the Roman Empire (in modern-day Turkey). He was fortunate to have as his mentors several important bishops, the first of whom was St. Jacob, one of those present at the first Council of Nicaea in 325. After the Council, Bishop Jacob appointed Ephrem as a teacher in his church. Although there is no extant historical record of Ephrem's education, it is obvious from his writings that he was extremely knowledgeable and erudite, and his bishop made good use of Ephrem's abilities. At a time when Orthodox teachings, especially on the Person of Christ, were being challenged from many different directions, one who could clearly expound the Church's teachings was of great value.

Ephrem was ordained deacon to further serve the church in Nisibis and his diaconal role may, of necessity, have included helping the people through military sieges in 338, 346, and 350. The Persian army attacked the Nisibis on those three occasions and their last effort was especially brutal as a nearby river was dammed in order to flood the city. In Ephrem's hymns about Nisibis, he describes this event, comparing the town to Noah's Ark.

But worse was to come. Emperor Julian (the "Apostate") was killed in 363 attempting an attack on Persian territory and in



the aftermath, Nisibis was given to Persia. One of the conditions of the peace treaty was that all of the Christian inhabitants of Nisibis would leave. Many of the Christians moved to join the Christian community of Edessa, Ephrem among them. He was probably in his 50s at this time, now facing a new challenge.

Edessa was the setting of even more religious speculation than Nisibis had been. Here, followers of Marcion, Bardaisan, Mani, and Arius vied for the attentions of Christians.

Ephrem's faithfulness to Orthodox Christianity in his writings, teachings, and in his life were needed even more here. Writing about 150 years after the death of Ephrem, another Syriac poet, Jacob of Serugh, said that he wrote hymns which were set to music for the women of the church to sing. This was probably to combat the efforts of the Arians who sent female choirs into the marketplace to spread their doctrines in a popular way.

A famine, probably due to drought, occurred in Edessa in 372. Deacon Ephrem was able to help many people who were suffering from hunger. He observed that some people had stockpiles of food that they were unwilling to share with their less fortunate neighbors. Ephrem chastised them for their lack of charity and offered to act as the distribution manager of all the grain in storage. He cordoned off some streets in the city and set up beds for those who were very ill. Food was provisioned out to all so that there were no more deaths from starvation. This was the last

recorded act of charity in St. Ephrem's life, as he passed from this world to the next in the year 373.

St. Ephrem was faithful to the end. Through the turmoil of war, exile, famine, and challenges to the faith, he used his skills as a writer and teacher to pass on the Truth and he gave of his time and energy in helping those in need. May we, through the grace of God and the prayers of St. Ephrem, do likewise.

Resources: St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise, *Introduction and translation by Sebastian Brock*; The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 91: St. Ephrem the Syrian - Selected Prose Works, *tr. by Edward Mathews, Jr. and Joseph Amar*; Orthodox Saints Vol. I *by George Poulos*; *online articles from Wikipedia, OrthodoxWiki, and the Orthodox Church in America.*

Parish News

The Feast of the Epiphany will be celebrated on Saturday morning, January 6, with the Blessing of Water at 9:30AM, Mass at 10:00 and a pot-luck brunch following. Due to the cold weather we have been experiencing, a frozen water pipe and the consequent lack of running water at the church meant that our celebration of the Circumcision of Our Lord on January 1 had to be cancelled. However, this problem has now been resolved and we can continue our schedule of services as planned.

It is time to schedule Epiphany house blessings. As 2018 presents a very short Epiphany, please speak with Fr. Nicholas or Fr. Raphael to schedule yours by February 3. It is helpful if we can schedule several house blessings in the same area on the same day.

Our annual Parish Meeting will take place after the Liturgy on Sunday, January 21, at which time we will elect new Parish Council members, discuss a proposed budget for the new year and

hear reports of various parish activities. Please plan to stay for this important meeting of our parish family.

We will continue to collect canned goods for the *Food for the Hungry* collection through Sunday, January 14.

The Epiphany of Our Lord

by Dom Prosper Guéranger

The Epiphany is indeed a great Feast, and the joy caused us by the birth of our Jesus must be renewed on it, for, as though it were a second Christmas Day, it shows us our Incarnate God in a new light. It leaves us all the sweetness of the dear Babe of Bethlehem, who hath appeared to us already in love; but to this it adds its own grand manifestation of the divinity of our Jesus. At Christmas, it was a few Shepherds that were invited by the Angels to go and recognize the *Word made flesh*; but now, at the Epiphany, the voice of God himself calls the whole world to adore this Jesus, and hear him.

The mystery of the Epiphany brings upon us three magnificent rays of the Sun of Justice, our Savior. In the calendar of pagan Rome, this sixth day of January was devoted to the celebration of a triple triumph of Augustus, the founder of the Roman Empire; but when Jesus, our Prince of peace, whose empire knows no limits, had secured victory to his Church by the blood of the Martyrs - then did his Church decree, that a triple triumph of the Immortal King should be substituted, in the Christian calendar, for those other three triumphs. which had been won by the son of Caesar.

There were united in the Epiphany, three manifestations of Jesus' glory: the mystery of the Magi coming from the East, under the guidance of a star, and adoring the Infant of Bethlehem as the divine King; the mystery of the Baptism of Christ, who,



whilst standing in the waters of the Jordan, was proclaimed by the Eternal Father as Son of God; and thirdly, the mystery of the divine power of this same Jesus, when he changed the water into wine at the marriage-feast of Cana.

Let us, then, open our hearts to the joy of this grand Day; and on this Feast of the Theophany, let us look with love at the dazzling beauty of our Divine Sun...The Shepherds, who were called by the Angels to be the first worshipers, have been joined by the Prince of Martyrs, the Beloved Disciple, the dear troop of Innocents;... and now, today, these Saints open their ranks to let the Kings of the East come to the Babe in his crib, bearing with them the prayers and adorations of the whole human race. The humble stable is too little for such a gathering as this, and Bethlehem seems to be worth all the world besides. Mary, the Throne of the divine Wisdom, welcomes all the members of this court with her gracious smile of Mother and Queen; she offers her Son to man, for his adoration and to God, that he may be well pleased. God manifests himself to men, because he is great; but he manifests himself by Mary, because he is full of mercy...

Let us imitate the faith and obedience of the Magi: let us adore, with the holy Baptist, the divine Lamb, over whom the heavens open: let us take our place at the mystic feast of Cana, where our dear King is present, thrice manifested, thrice glorified. In the last two mysteries, let us not lose sight of the Babe of Bethlehem; and in the Babe of Bethlehem let us cease not to recognize the Great God in whom the Father is well-pleased and the supreme Ruler and Creator of all things.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>January 2018</h1>						<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>
	1 The Circumcision of Our Lord and Octave Day of the Nativity <i>Mass at 10am</i> W	2 Octave Day of St. Stephen; St. Fulgentius, BC, 533	3 Octave Day of St. John, Ap. Ev.; St. Genevieve, V, 512	4 Octave Day of the Holy Innocents, Mm; St. Titus, BC, c. 96	5 Vigil of the Epiphany of Our Lord; St. Simeon Stylites, C, 460	6 The Epiphany of Our Lord <i>Mass at 10am</i> W <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
7 First Sunday after Epiphany; St. Cedd, BC, 664 W	8 St. Lucius & comp., Mm, c. 290; St. Severinus, Ab, 482	9 of the Octave of Epiphany	10 of the Oct. of Epiphany; St. Paul the First Hermit, C., c. 345	11 of the Octave of Epiphany; St. Hyginus, PM, c. 142; St. Theodosius, Ab, c. 529	12 of the Octave of Epiphany; St. Benedict Biscop, Ab, 690	13 Octave Day of Epiphany; St. Kentigern, BC, 603 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
14 Second Sunday after Epiphany; St. Hilary, BCD, 367; St. Nina, V, 335 W	15 St. Maurus, Ab, 584	16 St. Marcellus, PM, 309, St. Honoratus, BC, 429	17 St. Anthony, Ab, 356	18 Chair of St. Peter in Rome; St. Prisca, VM, c. 270	19 St. Mark of Ephesus, BC, 1445	20 Ss. Fabian, BM & Sebastian, M, 3rd c. <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
21 Third Sunday after Epiphany; St. Agnes, VM, 304 G	22 St. Vincent, M, 304; St. Anastasius, M, 628	23 St. Emerentiana, VM, c. 304; St. John the Almoner, BC, c. 619	24 St. Timothy, BM, 97	25 Conversion of St. Paul	26 St. Polycarp, BM, 156	27 St. John Chrysostom, BCD, 407 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
28 Fourth Sunday after Epiphany; The Second Feast of St. Agnes, VM G	29	30 St. Martina, VM, 228; St. Bathildes, QMa, 680	31			

Confessions are heard after Vespers, during the Psalms at Matins, and by appointment.

Coffee Hour follows Mass. Sunday School is during Coffee Hour.