



FOREFEAST OF THE THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

January 3

THE HYMN

Apolytikion of the Forefeast of Epiphany

“O Zabulon, prepare, and be ready, Nephthalim. Jordan River, hold your course, and exultantly receive the Master who is coming to be baptized. Adam leap for joy with Eve the Foremother. No longer hide yourselves, as once in Paradise; for having seen you naked He has appeared to clothe you in your former vesture. The Christ has appeared, wishing to renew the entire creation.”

THE SERMON

Put on Christ

The apolytikion hymn of the Forefeast of Epiphany introduces us to some aspects of the deeper significance of the Feast of the Theophany of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let us consider the two names that may perhaps be unfamiliar to us: Zabulon and Nephthalim. These are the names of two of the twelve children of Patriarch Jacob, the traditional ancestor of the people of Israel from the Old Testament. The descendants of Jacob's twelve sons constituted the twelve tribes of Israel. Each of the twelve tribes took the name corresponding to the son of Jacob, which constituted it. When the Israelites left Egypt and settled in the land of Palestine, each of the twelve tribes received a specific territory. The Zabulon and Nephthalim tribes settled in the north, where many gentiles also eventually came.



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There are many references to these two names in the Old Testament. The Old Testament prepares us for the coming of the Messiah. The Incarnation of Christ in the New Testament is a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. This hymn is closely connected to a prophecy of Isaiah, which is also mentioned in the New Testament: "And leaving Nazareth, He [Jesus] came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet [Isaiah 9:1-2], saying: 'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned'" (Matthew 4:13-16).

We learn then that Christ lived in this area which extends from near the sea of Genesaret to the east of the Jordan. This area eventually became occupied by gentiles. Its inhabitants, who sat in the darkness of religious ignorance and deceit, were also able to witness, along with the people of Israel, the great spiritual radiance of Christ's presence. The light of the Gospel was proclaimed to those who were spiritually enslaved in this land said to be covered by the dense darkness of sin and death. The divine light extends to embrace not only the Israelites but the whole of humankind. The most wonderful message of salvation, peace, and love manifests itself and spreads by the grace of the Holy Spirit throughout the entire earth.

The hymn very vividly exhorts the first-formed Adam and Eve to rejoice and to cease concealing their nakedness. As promised, their Creator took on flesh to renovate creation and to reclothe them once more in heavenly glory.

Christ is baptized in order to clothe and shield Adam and Eve and, by extension, all of us. The Apostle Paul declares, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). With our baptism, Jesus Christ covers us in a garment of light, restoring our original ability to reach God and become adopted sons by grace. Baptism frees us from the naked exposure and bondage to passion and sin and liberates us from the enduring fear and terror of death. Through baptism, we become participants in the rejuvenation and restoration of the human person.

We are invited to shine brightly with the garment of light that Christ bestows on us. Instead of walking in fear in the Garden of Eden like Adam and Eve, we are set to continue in the struggle and journey for the glory of salvation. We do so by way of true repentance, with unceasing spiritual alertness through prayer and fasting, by fully participating in the sacraments and services of our Church, and with good works (in word and action) based on true love and sincere compassion. Let us, therefore, answer positively to Christ's call to turn away from the darkness of sin and to step into His divine light, for us and for our salvation.