



FOREFEAST OF THE THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

January 4

THE HYMN

I Kathisma, Matins Service January 4th

Behold, Christ draws near to Jordan and cries out to the Forerunner: Hasten to baptize Me, in the river's stream, that I may cleanse all creation from sin. Stretch forth your hand upon My head, for by a mighty deed I come to heal the fall!

THE SERMON

Putting On The Grace of Renewal

God of glory and of light, the Lord of heaven and earth, comes to earth to live among us. He was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Most Holy Theotokos, to free us from darkness and ignorance. Christ shows us the way back to God and how we can unite with Him. He is baptized in the Jordan River, revealing to us the trinitarian nature of God. As this hymn so eloquently says, Christ cleanses all creation from sin.

The Incarnation of God makes possible every aspect of His life on earth: the Nativity, the Baptism, proclaiming the Gospel, the miracles, the institution of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and His Glorious Ascension. All of which not only serve the goal of our salvation, but the renewal of all creation. It is the sanctification of all creation that we properly celebrate with the Theophany of our Lord, along with the beginning of His Mission in proclaiming the Gospel to the entire world.



**GREEK ORTHODOX
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DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The triune and uncontainable God allows Himself to dwell in the womb of the Virgin. The only begotten Son of God comes to live with us. *He humbles Himself* and agrees to be baptized in the Jordan River by Saint John the Baptist. With the Incarnation, God's plan for the salvation of the world is put into effect by Christ. The God-Man offers us the truly breathtaking possibility to break free from sin and corruption. He confers on us divine adoption, which we had been deprived of because of our distance from God. Christ enables us to realize our highest destiny and to be like God.

How is all of this possible today? The Church that Christ founded constitutes His Body, the laboratory of sanctification and transfiguration for humankind. We are initiated into the Church, the ark of our salvation, by living faith in Christ and baptism. Jesus tells us, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).

In the Church, we become children of God, sisters and brothers to each other. In the Church, we partake of the Body and Blood of the Lord. In the Church, we discover and internalize the Gospel of salvation. In the Church, we taste the love of God, the joy of prayer, spiritual peace, and all the priceless gifts of the Holy Spirit. In the Church, we come upon God's creation in the faces of our brothers and sisters, and we feel the duty to stand in solidarity with them in genuine love and heartfelt concern for their well-being.

It is also only in the Church that we can truly celebrate the great Feasts of our faith. If we don't attend the services of our Church, what kind of a Christian Holiday are we celebrating? If we don't listen to the hymns, the readings, and the prayers of the Church how can we celebrate the Theophany of our Lord without the Church? If we do not partake of the Body and Blood of Christ and unite ourselves sacramentally to Him, how can we understand Christ's mission for our salvation? If we do not allow ourselves to share in the joy of the Feast with our spiritual brothers and sisters, how can we feel truly renewed?

Sisters and brothers, let us prepare ourselves as much as possible to spiritually meet Christ, who comes to be baptized for us and for our transgressions. And if for whatever reason, we cannot attend Church, at least let us devote ourselves to intense prayer on these most holy of days. Let the most sweet name of Jesus Christ not be absent from our *lips, minds, and hearts*.