



THE THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

January 6

THE HYMN

Apolytikion, January 6

As You were baptized in the Jordan, O Lord, then the worship of the Trinity became 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 certainty of the word. O Christ God, who appeared and illumined the world, glory to You.

THE SERMON

The Manifestation Of The Holy Trinity

With the great Feast of Theophany, we celebrate the rebirth of our own nature wounded by sin. We also rejoice in the liberation of the created world from demonic domination. On this most holy of days, our Redeemer Christ recreates the tarnished Adam on the waters of the Jordan, crushing the power of the Devil. The Church invites all of us to hasten and receive the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the fullness of awe toward God. We are called to accept Christ, who is manifested in glory as "the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world" (John 1:9).

Adhering to God's command, John the Prophet had come to the outskirts of the Jordan River, calling the people to repent and to be baptized for the remission of their sins (Luke 3:2-3). Many people hastened to be baptized. One day, Jesus also came from Nazareth and was baptized by John in the Jordan (Mark 1:9). But Jesus did not remain in the water as the others did to confess their sins, since He is without sin. Saint Cyril of Jeru-



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salem says, “Christ was baptized not for the remission of sins (since He was sinless) but to bestow divine grace and value to those being baptized.”

As Jesus immediately comes out of the water, a series of extraordinary events takes place: the heaven opens, and the Holy Spirit in bodily form like a dove descends on Jesus, and a voice from heaven says: “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22).

In this supernatural scene, which the Apolytikion of the Feast so vividly depicts, all three *Hypostases* (a Greek word which means *person*) of the Holy Trinity are actively revealed: (1) God the Father with His voice from heaven, (2) the Son as the God-Man being baptized, and (3) the Holy Spirit in a form of a dove descending on Jesus to confirm the words of the Father.

Let us briefly consider each of the three events taking place during the Baptism of the Lord, starting with the opening of the Heavens. With the disobedience of Adam and Eve (the first humans), not only was the earthly Paradise closed shut, but the heavenly one as well. The spiritual Heavens, the heavenly Kingdom of God, therefore, remained inaccessible to humankind. Heavens now open in the prayerful presence of our Lord Jesus Christ during His Baptism. Thus, a new path opens for us, which leads us back to the heavenly Kingdom.

The Holy Spirit then descends “in the form of a dove.” The dove had signaled to Noah that the flood had stopped. In a similar fashion, the Holy Spirit announces a new era, a new period of peace and grace of God towards humankind: “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11).

Next, a voice comes from heaven, the voice of God the Father, with which the *messianic* (referring to the *Messiah*) mission of Jesus Christ is publicly acknowledged. And from this point, the God-Man Lord properly begins His work for the salvation of the world.

In addition to the significance of Christ’s Baptism for the more general redemption and sanctification of creation, the Church from the beginning also highlighted the specific importance of the sanctification of the waters. That is why the great Feast of Theophany is connected to the service of the Great Blessing of the Waters (in Greek, Μεγάλος Αγιασμός), an important sacrament in its own right, which is conducted together with the Divine Liturgy, as an extension of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

The Great Blessing of the Waters is theologically very meaningful because it clearly reveals the sanctification of both the material creation and its deliverance from corruption, which was caused by the Fall and the rebellion against the Creator. The Lord, with His Baptism in the waters of the Jordan, sanctifies the waters and all of nature. “Today the substance of water is made holy...” we chant at the beginning of the Great Blessing, and the priest petitions that the water be sanctified by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is our hope and desire that the Holy Water blessed this year may be for the sanctification of those who receive it. May their souls be cleansed of their sins, and may their bodies be

protected from every disease. May they be enlightened with the knowledge of the true God. Also, may the Holy Water protect Christians from all the actions of Satan, and may their homes be blessed and sanctified.

May the Divine Light of Christ fully manifested in Glory guide the entire course of our lives. Amen.