

HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH

THROUGH THE CROSS JOY HAS COME INTO ALL THE WORLD

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DYING BEFORE WE DIE: HOMILY FOR THE SUNDAY BEFORE THEOPHANY Fr. Christopher Foley

Prepare, O River Jordan!

Behold, Christ is coming to be baptized by John in thee!

Rejoice, O barren wilderness!

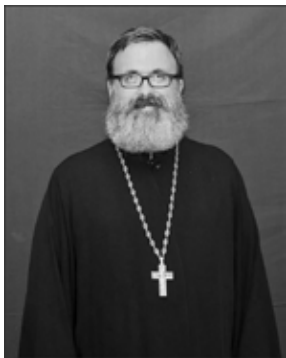
Dance in gladness, ye hills and mountains!

Eternal Life is coming to reclaim Adam.

O Forerunner, call out with the voice of one who cries:

"Prepare the ways of the Lord! Make straight His paths!"

We hear often –during this season “Prepare, prepare!”



“Prepare O cave. Prepare, O Bethlehem!” We have discussed the need to prepare the cave of our hearts to make room for the Savior at His incarnation in the flesh. Now we hear “Prepare O River Jordan!” We hear St. John the Forerunner calling out, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make His path straight!”

We have celebrated the Nativity of our Lord and now are looking toward something even greater – the full revelation of the Christ, the Son of the living God. “This is my son in whom I am well-pleased,” we hear the Father say. He who was born quietly in a cave for our salvation is now made fully manifest as our Savior and redeemer.

Originally the birth and baptism of Christ was celebrated as a double-feast on January 6 but eventually the church, in her wisdom, decided to celebrate the birth a something separate though still being connected to Theophany. December 25 was 9 months after the Annunciation which had already been a fixed feast day in the liturgical year.

Both feasts follow the same liturgical pattern with its own pre-festal, festal and post-festal season. These feasts intentionally “speak” to one another and are meant to be celebrated with the same joyful character.

There is a connection to the cave of His birth, the depths of the waters at His baptism and His tomb in which His cold body was laid. At Nativity the cave becomes the womb into which Christ is born in to this world for our salvation. He was born quietly in this cave – a place where people are buried – it becomes the tomb, foreshadowing His own Passion and Death. He was born in order to die for us. He took on our flesh at His birth from Mary. We call this His Incarnation.

God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us. He came not only to become one of us while remaining God. He came to glorify and sanctify all of creation. He came to unite us with Himself. He came to restore and recreate us. This includes all of creation – all of the cosmos. This is what we celebrate on this Life-giving Feast of our Lord’s baptism – His own descent into the water. He lived and breathed and experienced everything that we do. His baptism is a foreshadowing of His own death and resurrection. Christ experienced death and hell. He went to free the captives as St. Peter taught.

Today as we commemorate our Lord’s baptism, we have witnessed this mystery recently in our midst through our recent baptisms. Today we are reminded of our own baptism into Christ. “**As many as have been baptized in to Christ, have put on Christ.**” In imitation of Christ’s baptism. In imitation of Christ’s descent into hell, let us also enter into this death, this going down into the waters. But let us not stay there, let us die in these waters of death and sin and be recreated today in Christ. We die and rise with Christ. It is here that we descend with Christ into death, into hell in the waters of baptism. It is a type for us of our death. St. Basil says,

There is only one death and only one resurrection, of which baptism is the figure. That is why the Lord established the covenant of baptism, which contains the figures of death and life, the water being the likeness of death and the Spirit imparting life ... The water appears as the image of death because it receives the body as if into a tomb; the Spirit infuses life-giving strength and renews our life, which is in a mortal state of sin, to the state of original life... In the water we die, but the Spirit produces life in us.

This tomb becomes a womb for us. The Fathers tell us that we can live the resurrected life even before the resurrection comes on condition that we die before we die. Fr. Thomas Hopko says,

We need to die to our own mind so that we can have the mind of Christ. Die to our own will so that we can do the will of God, dying to our own thoughts so that we can have the thoughts of God... you can't have these things unless you're willing to give up your own. If we say "yes" to God, we have to say "no" to other things.

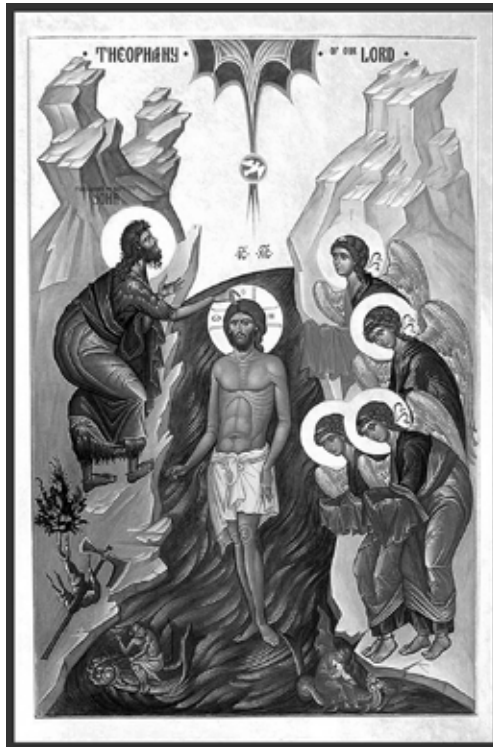
This means that we need to learn to die before we die. This is what repentance means. We need to learn to die. Some say that our whole life is preparation for our death. I would say that we are not truly alive until we first die.

Above the gateway of an Orthodox Christian monastery on Mt. Athos is inscribed the epigram: **"If You Die Before You Die Then You Won't Die When You Die."**

We die by facing ourselves and all of our sin. We die by confessing and repenting of these sins and "put on Christ." Fr. Zacharias of Essex says,

St Andrew of Crete states that the souls of all the faithful will, sooner or later, in one way or another, be allowed by God to go through hell in this earthly life, not that they perish but that they might come to know the mystery of the way of Christ, including His descent into hell. None of the Saints, that is, the faithful, are to be de-

prived of the honor of traveling Christ's way and tasting of hell, and thereby entering into the mystery of Christ's omnipresence, even in the lower parts of the earth. The experience will afford them deep knowledge of God, His humility and love for man, and they will become theologians [knowers of God] in a natural way.



In order for the tomb of the baptismal water to become a womb of birth we need to repent and allow the Spirit given at our Chrismation to act within us. Just as this Spirit moved across the face of the waters at creation so we must allow the Spirit to move over the face of our baptismal waters to re-create us into Life, which is our Life in Christ. This is the point of Theophany – our refashioning, our recreation, our regeneration, our restoration, our own Pascha from death into life. Thus our life means, according to Olivier Clement,

... gradually becoming aware of 'baptismal grace', and this awareness trans-

forms the whole person. [The baptismal sequence of death and resurrection is repeated throughout our pilgrimage... When everything is lost, baptismal grace, if we pay heed to it, can convert a situation of death into one of resurrection, an apparent deadlock into a necessary breakthrough, We have to learn – and this is the whole meaning of asceticism – to get around obstacles, to tear away dead skin, to let the very life of Christ arise in us by the power of His resurrection.] Each present moment has to become baptismal: a moment of anguish and death if I seek to cling to it and so experience its non-existence, but a moment of resurrection if I accept it humbly as 'present' in both senses of the word, almost like the gift of manna (which is a foretaste of the Eucharist). We come finally to the moment of agony when we are overwhelmed by the waters of death. Through our baptism, according to the measure of our faith, they will be transformed into the womb of eternity.

It is here that we are birthed into the arms of the church as our Mother which guides, comforts, nurtures and feeds us

with the Body of Christ.

Today we continue to feast, celebrate, proclaim and enter into this reality of the restoration not only of ourselves, but the entire Cosmos – all of creation into that which it was intended to be from the beginning – the place of communion with God, our creator and re-creator. He did not leave us as orphans when we chose to distort and destroy ourselves and all of creation through sin. He came to save us and raise us up with Himself. Our salvation is much more than securing our eternal place or simply being saved *from* something. It is rather being saved *to* something. St. John Chrysostom states emphatically,

We have been freed from punishment, we have put off all wickedness, and we have been reborn from above, and we have risen again. With the old man buried, we have been redeemed, and we have been sanctified, and we have been given adoption into sonship, and we have been justified and we have been made brothers of the Only Begotten. We have been constituted joint heirs and concorporeal with Him and have been perfected in His flesh, and have been united to Him as a body to its head. All of this Paul calls an ‘abundance of grace,’ showing that what we have received is not just a medicine to counteract the wound, but even health and comeliness and honor and glory and dignities going far beyond what are natural to us... Christ paid out much more than the debt we owed, as much more as the boundless sea exceeds a little drop.

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever! Amen!



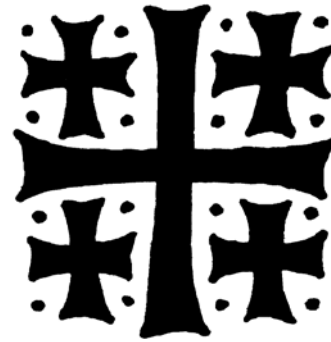
ANNOUNCEMENTS

Moleben on our property: We will continue serving a weekly short prayer service on our property in Kernersville. This is a service of supplication (Molieben) that Archbishop Dimitri of blessed memory blessed for the use of parishes in the diocese. Fr. Christopher will be serving

it on Friday mornings at 10 AM except where noted in the calendar. Our property is located at 1320 Masten Drive in Kernersville.

Sisterhood of the Holy Myrrhbearers: The Sisterhood will meet at 6:00PM on Tuesday, January 21.

Order Gift Cards Through Holy Cross! Scrip cards are available from hundreds of retailers and don't cost any more than the face value of the gift card. It's a "free" fundraiser to benefit the Holy Cross building fund! Contact Karen Brudnak-Slate.



FINANCIAL SUMMARY

December	Actual	Budgeted
Income	\$16,284	\$12,739
Expense	\$14,214	\$11,297

2019	Actual	Budgeted
Income	\$164,802	\$152,864
Expense	\$134,756	\$135,561



HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3 10AM Prayers at the Property	4 6 PM Great Vespers
5 9AM Church School 9AM Adult Class 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy 6:30PM Great Vespers	6 THEOPHANY 8AM Divine Liturgy	7	8 6:30PM Compline & Catechism Class	9 6PM Parish Council	10 10AM Prayers at the Property	11 6 PM Great Vespers
12 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy 11:30AM Outdoor Blessing of the Waters 6:30PM OCAT Home Meeting	13	14	15 7:30 PM Choir Rehearsal	16	17 10AM Prayers at the Property	18 6 PM Great Vespers
19 9AM Church School 9AM Adult Class 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	20	21 6PM Sister- hood	22 6:30PM Compline & Catechism Class	23	24 10AM Prayers at the Property 5PM Open Door	25 6 PM Great Vespers
26 9AM Church School 9AM Adult Class 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	27	28	29	30	31 10AM Prayers at the Property	

