

# THE PROPHET

Monthly Newsletter of

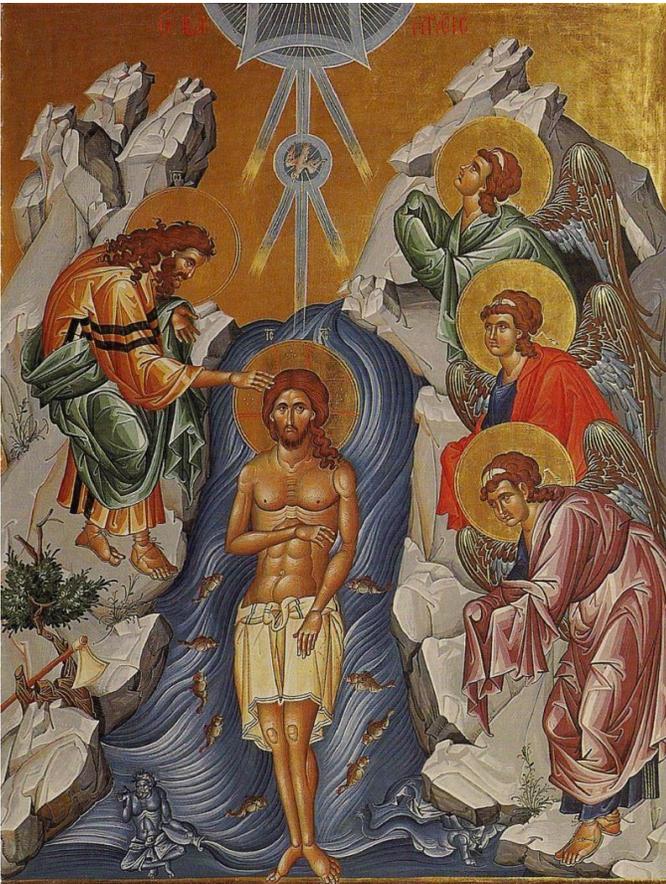
## St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church

Orthodox Church in America  
Archdiocese of Pittsburgh

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## January 2021



*Theophany of the Lord (Jan. 6)*

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### RECTOR'S REPORT:

Glory to Jesus Christ! Slava Isusu Christu!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

2020 was quite the year, with innumerable struggles and tribulations. Yet, as with all things given to us by God, it was also a blessing: an opportunity to grow in Christ and in love for our neighbour, including the families with which we have been blessed to spend more time than usual.

Yes, 2020 had its challenges, but as with all the crosses we are called to bear with Christ, did we respond in love or with impatient – even hatred? We are always being shaped by our actions, but in 2021 what will shape us? The love of God or the hatred we find in the fallen world?

However we fared over the last year, let us make this resolution, a resolution not just for the new year but for each and every day of our lives: let us be shaped by the commandments of Christ – by the love of Christ – and not by the poison and hatred of the world. Let us struggle to respond to our friends, families, neighbours – even those who hate us – with greater love and patience, especially given the fact that each and every person – made in God's image and with an inherent beauty and worth – is fighting battles which are often invisible to us, struggling in their own ways to cope with the challenges facing them, both with the pandemic and otherwise. Let us rejoice in our Lord who has given us this path to greater love by following His commandments, His way of life, *even when difficult*.

In Christ, with thanks and love,  
Fr. John Joseph Kotalik IV, Rector

**MEMORY ETERNAL:****(Вѣчная память!)****We continue our 40 days of prayer for:**

All those slain by the Coronavirus, especially:

Sdn. Andrew Sysock (12/12)

Richard Onest (12/28)

His Eminence, Abp. David of Alaska (11/27)

Michael Pirih (12/2)

Dorothy Petronka (12/2)

John Pavlek (12/4)

Sophie Onufer (12/5)

Ruth Schreiber (12/9)

Sergei Chidlowsky (12/10)

William Evansky (12/18)

**We commemorate the anniversaries of:**

Mary Federoff (1/1/1967)

Vasily Gosnedik (1/2/1925)

Mary Uachoa (1/2/1963)

Helen Bushko (1/2/1998)

Irina Voskreskov (1/3/1919)

Tatiana Voskresov (1/3/1923)

John Mehovic (1/4/1955)

Michael Grubbich (1/4/1963)

Helen Marinkov (1/5/1952)

John Sweda (1/6/1952)

Andrew Matyuf (1/6/2003)

Daria Grubich (1/7/1932)

Eva Fecicz (1/7/1990)

Anna Kopyy (1/7/1995)

Daniel Chicarella (1/8/1976)

George Mimuschak (1/10/1947)

Mary Godish (1/12/1985)

James Marley (1/12/1989)

John Kotyk (1/12/1992)

Debra Cobb (1/12/2020)

Mary Simon (1/13/1935)

Vasily Melnyk (1/13/1942)

Helen Brunasky (1/13/2013)

William Matyuf (1/14/2019)

Michael Maceiko (1/15/1926)

George Dohanich (1/15/1968)

John Zubenko (1/15/1999)

Robert Wright (1/15/2014)

Anna Dranchak (1/16/1978)

Mary Suwak (1/17/1998)

Andrew Arvay (1/18/1933)

John Shimansky (1/19/1939)

Joseph Chupinsky (1/19/1946)

John Haverlack (1/19/1971)

Ivan Mikitin (1/19/1972)

Wasil Bobronick (1/20/1968)

Thekla Skowranski (1/20/1971)

Michael Lazor (1/22/1980)

Mary Pavlek (1/22/2016)

Julia Spetek (1/22/2018)

Peter Rendziak (1/23/1980)

Steven Matyuf (1/23/2000)

Michael Woitel (1/23/2007)

Nicholas Yastrubkov (1/23/1922)

Charles Vasily Chizhov (1/24/1930)

Conrad Wasuchno (1/24/1961)

John Furman (1/24/1968)

Wasil Kolawach (1/25/1952)

John Beoley (1/25/1970)

Harold Matyuf (1/25/1976)

Catherine Wyck (1/25/1984)

Patrick Alterio (1/25/2018)

Julia Kovalovsky (1/26/1977)

Anastasia Gretskey (1/27/1938)

Onufer Kin (1/27/1959)

Marian Abraham (1/27/1997)

Eva Amal (1/27/2008)

Anna Smith (1/27/2015)

Frank Uram (1/28/1961)

Mary Drochak (1/28/1989)

Rolf Weber (1/28/2020)

Justinia Bikulin (1/29/1926)

Michael Kirr (1/29/1979)

Eve Dampf (1/29/2010)

Theodore Feyche (1/29/2012)

Efim Kondratow (1/30/1970)

**MANY YEARS:****(Многая и благая лѣта!)****Namedays:**

Richard Vasily Blaha (1/1)

Kingston James Vasily Eismont (1/1)

Todd Seraphim Geer (1/2)

John Migyanko (1/7)

Dn. Theodosius Onest (1/11)

Nina Onest (1/14)

Anthony Cario (1/17)

Anthony Kolarsky (1/17)

Gregory Sakovich (1/25)

Gregory Shamitko (1/25)

Gregory Oleynik (1/30)

**Birthdays:**

John Boschuk (1/1)

Megan Geer (1/3)

Eleanor Simko (1/8)

Alfred Davis (1/12)

Sonia Blaha (1/13)

Todd Geer (1/13)

Rd. John Thompson (1/16)

Aubrie Eismont (1/20)  
 Sophie Helinski (1/25)  
 Sandy Basso (1/27)  
 Christina Paradise (1/27)  
 Alexander Schenken (1/27)  
 Daniel Basso (1/29)  
 Abigail Strennen (1/30)

**Anniversaries:**

Gabriel & Anita Prince (1/15/72)

*If you or a loved one are missing, please let  
 Fr. John know so that we can correct our records!*

**PARISH PRAYER LIST:**

**We pray for the health and salvation of ALL our  
 parish family members, and especially for:**

Met. Hrizostom, Bp. Joanikije, Bp. Sava, Apr. Emilan,  
 Apr. John, Panimatka Anne, Nathan, Pr. Matthew,  
 Mat. Rebekah, Pr. Gabriel, and all those suffering from  
 the Coronavirus

Igumen Patrick (Carpenter)  
 Apr. George & Pres. Dianthe (Livanos)  
 Apr. John (Reeves)  
 Apr. Michael (Hatrak)  
 Mat. Natasha (Lazor)

Mat. Kelly Elizabeth (Oleynik)  
 Mat. Alexandra (Safchuk)

Mat. Sophia (Sokolov)

Mat. Susanne (Senyo)

Diane (Arcoletti)

Richard & Sonia (Blaha)

John (Boschuk)

Elaine (Gwen Bushko)

Alfred (Davis)

Elizabeth (Demsher)

Helene (Emerick)

Gregory (Kachmarsky)

Mark (Korabelnikov)

Rose (Lazorchak)

Shirley (Lazorchak)

Janice (Lenart)

Donald (Marsico)

Albert (Maruskin)

Brandon (Mayberry)

Gregg (Nescott)

Peter (Petronka)

Mary (Pirih)

Gabriel (Prince)

Anastasia (Rudolph)

Meretta (Stockman)

Carol (Sweda)

Luis (Thompson)

Richard (Trombetta)

Mary Kay (Weber)

Joseph & Mary Ann (Zupancic)

Alexander & Marissa, and the child to be born of her  
 (Schenken)

Rd. Michael, Ilariana, and the child to be born of her  
 (Galis)

**Catechumens/Inquirers:** Anthony, Hannah, Matthew,  
 Alicia, Paxton & Melissa

**Charity of the Month:**

**RIP MEDICAL DEBT**

*In renewed commitment to loving our neighbour in this  
 difficult time, on the last Sunday of each month a special  
 collection will be taken for a worthy charitable organiza-  
 tion. If you would like a charity to be considered, please  
 contact a member of the Outreach Committee, currently  
 Fr. John, Julianna Cario, & Marcie Killmeyer; or, if you  
 would like to join, please let us know!*

[ripmedicaldebt.org](http://ripmedicaldebt.org)

RIP Medical Debt empowers donors to for-  
 give billions in oppressive medical debt. They  
 are dedicated to removing the burden of medi-  
 cal debt for individuals and families and veter-  
 ans across America.

Medical debt destroys the financial stability of  
 large segments of America's most vulnerable com-  
 munities: the sick, the elderly, the poor, and veter-  
 ans. It also targets the middle class, driving many  
 families who are barely getting along into poverty.  
 Medical debt isn't the result of bad decisions. It's a  
 debt of necessity.

By forgiving this debt they strive to give strug-  
 gling individuals, and their families, a fresh start.  
 They hope to give those affected the ability to seek  
 the continued medical care they need and help  
 them back towards financial stability.

Every day, RIP Medical Debt receive messages  
 from people who suffer under crushing debt far be-  
 yond their financial means to pay – from the son of  
 a stroke survivor in Kentucky whose family could  
 not keep up with their mortgage payments, to the  
 cancer patient in Florida whose debts made it im-  
 possible for her to continue with necessary treat-  
 ment. Rising healthcare costs and endless bills are  
 leaving families with nowhere to turn, especially in  
 the midst of the Coronavirus Pandemic.

RIP Medical Debt, a New York based 501(C)(3),  
 uses donors' funds to wipe out medical debt from

the neediest cases up, and since 2014 has used donations to buy large bundles of medical debt and then forgive that debt with no tax consequences to donors or recipients. The results have been spectacular – \$2,923,063,975 in medical debts eradicated so far, providing financial relief for over 1,993,036 individuals and families. More spectacular is that, on average, each dollar donated is able to wipe out about \$100 of medical debt!

Currently, RIP Medical Debt is running a matching campaign for those suffering from medical debt in **Appalachia**, where out-of-pocket health-care costs are 40% higher than the national average. Nearly one in five people in Appalachia are in poverty, and medical debt makes that poverty impossible to escape. Medical debt destroys a family's credit rating; denying access to loans, an apartment, and even a job. People in medical debt are less likely to seek medical care or fill prescriptions so that, in the end, medical debt not only destroys well-being and economic security, it can kill.

All gifts to the Appalachia Campaign will be matched through January 31st! This means that each dollar we raise can be expected to wipe out \$200 in medical debt. In other words, if our parish could donate \$1,000 this month, we could wipe out about \$200,000 dollars in medical debt – nearly a quarter of a million! That is effectively a \$200k investment in Appalachian towns and cities. Money will stay in the community instead of being taken by out-of-state debt collectors. On average, a \$16 dollar donation can abolish the medical debt of an entire family, allowing them to invest in a home, schooling, or retirement. But, with the matching campaign, that is lowered to \$8. Can each of us spare \$8 this month? Or \$80 to help 10 families be free of hopeless debt? If each of our parish's 80 families were to donate \$80, we would be sending in a check to RIP Medical Debt for \$6,400, wiping out ~\$1,280,000 in medical debt with the current matching campaign! That is an amazing prospect.

Please consider this worthy charity, and on Sunday January 24 (given the Jan. 31 matching deadline), a collection will be taken. One check will then be sent to RIP Medical Debt by the parish. However, if you wish to donate directly, you can do so online, or by check: RIP Medical Debt, 80 Theodore Fremd Ave., Rye, NY 10580, writing "Appalachia Campaign" in the memo line.

## We Rejoice Even in Tribulation:

### An Encyclical of Hope

*of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America at the Conclusion of the Year of Our Lord 2020*

#### Greeting

To the Venerable Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America, cherished members of the Body of Christ, called to be saints in this North American land, sealed by the gift of the Holy Spirit, grace to you and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

#### Opening Thanksgiving

Our dear brothers and sisters in Christ, *we give thanks to God for you!* In a year of tribulations – a testing of our faith, perseverance, and character – you have shown great love to Christ in your willing obedience and unwavering service to the Church. How can we convey to you the concern each bishop has felt for his flock during these weeks and months? God knows our prayers for you, and He has sent us the consolation of your faithfulness and love.

Not only to us, however, have you shown this love, but also within your communities, in caring for one another: within families, between households, among brother clergy and circles of friends. Even beyond those closest to you, you have responded to those in need: to those who are homebound, or who have lost their homes, their livelihoods, and even their family members. Beloved, your love and service are the light of Christ and the seeds of the Kingdom. What hope we have obtained from these manifestations of the Holy Spirit in your hearts! Having received this consolation from you, we write now to strengthen you, in case anyone is becoming weary. We do not know what the coming year will bring, but we know that Christ is in our midst – He is, and ever shall be! It is precisely in these times of tribulation that we exclaim this with greater conviction than ever. As St. Paul writes to the Romans, "we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom 5:3-5). Let us not be downcast by our tribulations, but

take courage and find in them our hope of the Resurrection.

### **Part 1.1: Our Troubled World**

Let us not be surprised, however, if hope is not what the world feels when it looks back upon the year 2020 and into the New Year of 2021. By many people, the year 2020 will be remembered as one of calamity: the year of the COVID-19 pandemic; of violence perpetrated upon the weak by the strong; of civil unrest and rioting; of political polarization and turmoil; of fires, storms, and floods. In addition to all of this, many of us grappled with personal tragedy throughout the year, with the loss of loved ones, chronic and acute illnesses, financial ruin, accidents, abuse, addiction, and every other temptation and challenge. In the New Year, these troubles may well continue, or new ones may come.

Beloved in Christ, we see all of this as well. The Church does not look away from pain, suffering, and death – not our own, not that of our neighbor. But while those around us may see suffering and death as evidence of meaninglessness and chaos, we acknowledge this pain as an inescapable element of our broken world. The brokenness of the natural world, of our minds and hearts, of our relationships, and of our societies – all of this stems from the rebellion of human beings against God. Our attempts to live without Him have separated us and our world from the loving wholeness of life in the Holy Trinity.

### **Part 1.2: The Temptation of Fear**

It is precisely when we attempt to live without God, when we either forget Him or deliberately reject Him, that the world and its brokenness overwhelm us. Without God, we have everything to fear. We fear every possible loss, because we have no power to restore that which we lose. We fear pain, because we have no power to escape it, and we know it leads to our death. We fear not only imminent threats, but also those that we imagine, because we become unable to distinguish the difference between the two. God warns Israel of the consequences of rebellion, that for them, “the sound of a shaking leaf shall chase them. Then they shall flee as though fleeing from a battle, and shall fall when no one pursues” (Lev 26:36). Fear confuses and bewilders us, and it also further divides and isolates

us: “Brother shall disregard brother as in warfare, though no one is in pursuit” (Lev 26:37). We turn on each other, in fact, as the Midianite army destroyed itself at the shouting of the men with Gideon (Judg 7:22).

Brothers and sisters, such fear has manifested itself even amongst the faithful. Can any of us claim to have surrendered all our fears to God? In the midst of our fears concerning the pandemic, in particular, we have at times succumbed to divisive criticism and polemic, to doubts and inner panic leading to anxiety, despondency, and despair. The temptation of fear has been all the greater because we have witnessed changes to our liturgical life that none of us before imagined possible. In our fear, we may have asked ourselves and one another whether the Church itself has succumbed to the pandemic, whether its leaders have capitulated to the demands of the world, whether we have become paralyzed or lost our way.

### **Part 1.3: The Unshakable Church**

Beloved, all the measures taken by the Church during the pandemic have been undertaken out of love for our brothers and sisters. But the decisions about which measures to take and when to take them have not been easy ones. We your bishops pray earnestly for the guidance of the Holy Spirit at all times, and especially when faced with such a complex, dynamic, and unknown circumstance as the pandemic. All of our priests and deacons share in this challenge, and equally desire to act as the Holy Spirit directs within each parish. We echo the words that Paul wrote to the Colossians:

For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you, ...that [your] hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding (Col 2:1-2).

Our concern has been for both the physical and spiritual well-being of you, our cherished flock, and for our lands as a whole. Our boat is being tossed on the waves of a surging sea, but we know that Christ is in this boat with us; He has not abandoned us, and we have not abandoned one iota of our faith in Him. None of the protocols and precautions – no mask, physical distancing requirement, or call for hygiene – has stopped or can stop the

Church from her vocation of making Christ manifest in the world. Even the drastic steps of temporarily suspending or curtailing liturgical services were taken out of love, not fear: love of those in particular peril from the virus, love for healthcare workers overwhelmed with patients, love for those outside the Church for whom our cooperation was and is a witness of Christian charity. These steps have required all of us in the Church – bishops, clergy, monastics, and all the faithful – to work harder than ever, and to sacrifice a great deal. Yet we know that Christ, our Creator and Almighty Lord, is our rock amid this storm (Lk 6:48), and because our rock is unshakable, we have been willing to lay down our normal life out of love, for “greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13).

Along with this cooperation and concern for the weakest among us, however, we must have no doubt that the holy Body and Blood of our Lord is the source of our life. Our liturgical life is indeed essential, and therefore will never be abandoned by the faithful. We must approach the chalice without fear of disease, but with awe and reverence in the presence of Christ’s immeasurable condescension. The Church calls to us: “In the fear of God, with faith and love, draw near!” Even if we must maintain physical distance from our brothers and sisters in Christ within the temple, even if some of us cannot commune as frequently as we have in the past, we are united – bishops, clergy, monastics, and the faithful – as members of the Lord’s Body as we receive the Holy Gifts. Nothing can diminish or overcome this Mystery.

The chalice which Christ offers us, dear faithful, is truly an ineffable mystery: God transforms that which is perishable into His imperishable self; the humblest elements of the earth become the Holiest of Holies; Christ grants us life by His death. Yet we must remember that only by uniting ourselves to His death do we gain life in Him. In the waters of baptism, and in every Divine Liturgy when we approach the cup of Christ, we unite ourselves to the way of the Cross. The way of the Cross means tribulation, but – here is the great mystery, the great triumph, the great joy! – the tribulation leads to life in God. The Cross and Resurrection at the heart of the Church give us new eyes to see ourselves and the world in which we live. God takes all that is

broken and transforms it into the means of uniting us to Himself: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Mt 16:24). Our crosses are precisely the troubles and difficulties resulting from our broken world and broken selves. Each difficulty is a means by which we may enter into the Resurrection. “Behold, through the Cross, joy has come into the world!” Beloved, we are surrounded not by meaninglessness and chaos, but by opportunities to enter ever more deeply into the life, love, and joy of God.

### **Part 2.1: Through Brokenness into Joy**

It is, of course, one thing to say that our trials and sufferings are opportunities to enter into the love of God, and another to live such a paradox moment by moment. At times, our fear and grief may leave us angry and confused, asking, “How can good possibly come of this?” But the Lord has not left us the paradox of life from death as a puzzle, like a Rubik’s Cube that only the very clever can solve – no! Through the mystery of His Cross and Resurrection He has unlocked the door for us, and He Himself shows us how to pursue this process of transformation, a path that takes us through our brokenness into joy.

### **Part 2.2: Acknowledging Our Fear**

First, we must not be ashamed to admit that we feel fear. Christ has inspired the words of Holy Scripture that abound with expressions of fear and anxiety, particularly in the psalms. At Vespers the Church cries out:

With my voice unto the Lord have I cried,  
with my voice unto the Lord have I made  
supplication. [...] When my spirit was faint-  
ing within me, then Thou knewest my paths”  
(Ps 141).

At Compline, Matins, and in many moliebens or parakleses, we pray Psalm 142:

My spirit within me was despondent, within  
me, my heart was troubled. [...] Quickly hear  
me, O Lord; my spirit has fainted away.

The Six Psalms of Matins, in particular, give voice to our experience of suffering and fear:

“O Lord, why are they multiplied that afflict  
me” (Ps 3)? “I am afflicted and humbled

exceedingly, I have roared from the groaning of my heart. [...] My heart is troubled, my strength hath failed me; and the light of mine eyes, even this is not with me" (Ps 37). "I am counted with them that go down into the pit; I am become as a man without help, free among the dead, like the bodies of the slain that sleep in the grave, whom Thou rememberest no more, and they are cut off from Thy hand" (Ps 87).

In Psalm 87 we express our deepest fear: to become like those whom God remembers no more, who are cut off from His hand. We fear that God has forgotten us, that He has discarded us. We feel this fear because it is we who, temporarily at least, forgot God. We forgot that we are His creation and we are in His hands, and our self-imposed separation from His life-giving presence has finally overwhelmed us. When we realize our feelings of fear, anger, anxiety or despondency, it is an opportunity to look at ourselves and our relationship with God. Somehow our hearts have strayed from Him; but through the tribulations we are experiencing, God is calling us to return to Him by embracing our own cross and resurrection.

### **Part 2.3: Accepting God's Providence**

The psalms themselves point the way for us from fear back to God. They take us from the first step of admitting our fear to the second step of submitting ourselves (again) to God. Our admission of fear cannot be an expression of anger: "I am suffering and afraid, God, and how dare You permit this!" Rather, we release our fear by turning to the Lord in humility and with trust in His goodness. We show Him our wound and ask for His healing mercy: "Forsake me not, O Lord my God, depart not from me. Be attentive unto my help, O Lord of my salvation" (Ps 37). If we still find rebellion in our hearts, then we humbly bring that before the Lord, again and again.

This attitude of admission and submission — or as we more commonly call it, confession and repentance — allows us to accept all of the difficult circumstances of our life with gratitude. We need not pretend that such circumstances are good in themselves. Yet these collisions with our broken world bring us to our senses. They show us our separation from God and our utter powerlessness

without Him. The great Apostle Paul himself admits:

Concerning this thing [the thorn in the flesh], I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor 12:8-10).

God arranges for us precisely those tribulations that will move us forward on our spiritual journey by showing us our own weakness and God's strength. If we open our hearts to Him in honest confession and repentance, He meets us in those tribulations with a grace and strength we could not have imagined.

To those outside the Faith, the assertions that God arranges tribulations and that we would "take pleasure in infirmities" and "glory in tribulations" may sound as though we seek to inflict harm on ourselves. Is God seeking vengeance on us for our sins? Are we seeking to expiate our sins with pain? No, beloved in the Lord: God is our Father, and He seeks to heal us. A cancer patient rejoices in a surgery that excises the cancer. Does the surgery hurt? Absolutely. The pain from the incisions may linger for a long time. But each twinge or even stab of pain from those wounds reminds the patient that the cancer in those places is gone. He can rejoice in the pain that renews his gratitude. God is not the source of tribulations — He created a good world, and we are the ones who broke it — but in His almighty providence He permits us to experience some of the consequences of our rebellion in order to help us. The Apostle Paul reminds us in the Epistle to the Hebrews,

Brethren, whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chastens not? But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh

who corrected us, and we were not put to shame. Shall we not far rather be in subjection unto the Father of Spirits, and live? For they chastened us for a few days as it pleased them, but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. For no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby. Therefore, lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed (Heb 12:6-13).

God is our loving Father, Who knows precisely what tribulations will ultimately be to our benefit. Although no chastening seems joyous in the moment of tribulation, we can rejoice in the assurance that God is knocking on the door of our hearts (Rev 3:20); He is seeking us as the Shepherd searches for the lost sheep (Lk 15:4). We can cry out to Him in admission and submission, and find peace and joy in that very act; peace and joy that will continue to grow as we open our hearts more and more to the grace of God. When we lift up our hands and fall to our knees, when we make our paths straight by returning to Him, He grants us “the peaceable fruit of righteousness,” peace and joy.

Beloved, this is the process by which “we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Rom 5:3-4). Yes, we glory in our tribulations, knowing that by the grace of God, they are working the transformation of our hearts! But this transformation takes time; St. Paul does not write that tribulation immediately produces hope, but that “tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character, hope.” Let us not be downcast at the prospect of a slow transformation, but thankful for the Lord’s condescension in teaching us so patiently, so tenderly. Parents and teachers, it is never too early to begin this lesson with our children. We suffer acutely when they suffer – the heart of the Theotokos was pierced when her Son hung on the Cross – but our greatest task is not to remove every tribulation from them (which we are unable to do), but to teach them how to accept difficulties with faith and

perseverance that produce hope and joy. Our children depend upon us for this example, and we will find that they will also teach and encourage us.

In addition to bringing our own fear and pain to God, however, we may also find ourselves deeply troubled by the suffering endured by others, particularly the deep injustices and intense suffering experienced by entire groups of people. Dearly beloved, in such circumstances there are two things for us to remember: first, that God loves those who are oppressed and suffer with innocence more than we or they can comprehend, and He will not abandon them; second, that in their suffering, He draws them to Himself on the Cross, and prepares great glory for them in the Resurrection. What is essential for us is to ask how we can serve those who are suffering, and then to do what the rich man in the gospel failed to do (Lk 16:29-31). How can we help those in need? How can we help those who are oppressed? Dear ones, you have already begun to do this, so do not slacken your efforts! Peace and joy are to be found here, as well – not earned by our good works, but bestowed upon the helpers and those who are being helped, by the grace of God.

#### **Part 2.4: Journeying into God’s Kingdom**

What is remarkable is that even while we endure shared tribulations – the pandemic, political turmoil, civil strife, disasters – each of us is on a unique, personal journey of transformation in Christ, and these tribulations God has arranged for each one of us in a personal, profound way. On the other hand, while each of us has an entirely unique life and journey, there are always companions near us who have experienced something similar and understand our pain. Each of us is unique, but none of us is alone. Moreover, we are all on the same path, we have the same vocation and goal: life in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, by the will of the Father.

Our beloved brothers and sisters, we do not know what we will encounter in the coming year, but we know our ultimate destination. May the Lord’s will be done in our lives, that His Kingdom may come! If we can look back on 2020 – truly, a year of Our Lord – with confession, repentance, and thanksgiving, we can face the uncertainty of the future with peace, joy, and hope. This task will

not always be easy; we are surrounded by temptations to live in fear, isolation, division, and despair. But let us use the tools God has given us to soften our hearts and open our eyes! We can draw inspiration from the experience of so many who testified that even in the face of so much, the life of the Church continued: the faithful were baptized, married, ordained, and buried. Missions were begun and supported. Praise and thanksgiving to God never ceased.

Further, let us remember the Lord's blessings far more than we contemplate tribulations. Even when we encounter very serious challenges, God gives us countless consolations, which we often take for granted! The Akathist of Thanksgiving is a beautiful service written from within a Soviet gulag, a place of intense darkness and pain. The praise offered to the Lord therein reminds us of all the beauty and love around us, even as we suffer. We also have the Akathist to the Theotokos, Joy of All Who Sorrow, bringing us to the feet of the Theotokos, our mother. She who stood at the foot of the Cross and whose heart was pierced also received the first tidings of the Resurrection. She is given to us as a helper, consoler, and protector, and with her, all the saints. The accounts of their lives and their beautiful, inspired writings, help us along our way and remind us to give thanks for all things.

We have already considered the helpfulness of the psalms, and these ancient songs make up the bulk of the services of the Church. If you are at all able, go to your church for services, whether indoor or outdoor; pray along with services from our parishes and monasteries online; pray the services of Vespers, Matins, or Compline in your home, which is the Little Church. You will pray the psalms, and the psalms will begin to pray inside of you. You will join your voice to the voices of all the faithful, through all the centuries and millennia.

Dear ones, let us also consider the prayer inside the secret place of our hearts (Mt 6:6). It is not enough for us to go to church once or twice a week. We must also have an inner life of prayer, cultivated in quietness and stillness. Our monastics work very deliberately at such prayer, but such prayer is not only for them! Each of us can, in whatever way suits the circumstances of our life, make time to "be still, and know that I am God" (Ps

45:10). Meditation upon Scripture is a precious gift to embrace during such quiet time. St. John Chrysostom exhorted his flock again and again to read the Scriptures zealously and to teach them to children, for "great is the profit to be derived from the sacred Scriptures and their assistance is sufficient for every need" (Hom. 37 on John). Christ is the Word of God, and He meets and speaks with us through the words of Scripture as He spoke with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:27).

As we enrich our inner lives with quiet prayer and Scripture, when we participate in the services offered through the Church, we will find that we approach the Holy Mysteries with a renewed sense of need. Let us run to confession with our priests, and receive the Lord's Body and Blood with faith and love! He gives us Himself as food, so that we may receive Him in our hearts and return to the world to make Him incarnate here and now. Through all these efforts, we will become whole; we will not have compartments of our life "at home," "at church," and "at work." All our life will become integrated as a seamless "living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God" (Rom 12:1). By these efforts we obey Paul's injunction that we "not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2). But this will be a gradual process: we will not jump from struggles to sainthood in a week, a month, or a year. What are the steps we can take right now, however small? When we take even a tiny step towards Christ, He runs to meet us as the Father ran to meet the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:20)! He will send the Holy Spirit into our hearts, nursing even a tiny spark into an ever-greater flame. We must have perseverance, but Christ promises us hope: "Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who was given to us" (Rom 5:5).

### Conclusion

Beloved, we have just come through the Nativity season, in which we celebrated the Birth in the Flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is with us! He condescends to us with ineffable love, precisely so that He may take all the suffering of the world into Himself upon the Cross. He shares our life, filled with tribulation, so that we may share in His life. This is our hope! This is our joy! Because He is with

us, we need not be afraid. Our burdens are His burdens; He will not remove them from us, but He makes us able to bear them by dwelling within us. When Our Lord and Savior lives in us, we can do all things through Him, Who strengthens us (Phil 4:13). What were the words of the Archangel to the Theotokos at the Annunciation (Lk 1:30)? “Do not be afraid.” What were the words of Gabriel to Joseph the Betrothed in his dream (Mt 1:20), and the exclamation of the angels to the shepherds in the fields (Lk 2:10)? “Do not be afraid.” Christ Himself says to us, “In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

As we begin the New Year, the Year of Our Lord 2021, we will celebrate the Feast of Theophany, in which Christ descends into the chaotic waters and transforms them into the waters of life. One of the prophecies read at the Great Blessing of the Waters says, “Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree” (Is 55:13). Dear children of God, this is not a promise that God will remove tribulation from our temporal lives. Rather, it is a promise that God will transform the tribulation we encounter into the means by which we enter the Kingdom. This is the way of the Cross: a scandal and foolishness to many, but the power of God to those of us who believe (I Cor 1:23). Thus the briar becomes the myrtle; the tribulations become the crosses we take up in order to follow Christ into the Resurrection. By His grace, no longer will they be heavy burdens, but the light yoke for which we give thanks and by which we enter into everlasting life.

Let us rejoice! Let us bear one another’s burdens, let us give aid to those who are suffering or oppressed, let us not judge one another. Pray for one another. Pray for us, your bishops; we pray for you earnestly, with great tenderness. You are our joy in the Lord, because Christ is manifest among you! At Theophany, Christ sanctifies the waters by which we receive the Holy Spirit; we receive His light so that we may in turn shine forth as spiritual lights in the world. This is our calling in 2021, and every day of our lives: to enthrone Christ in our hearts, so that it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us (Gal 2:20). This is our hope, this is our joy! Let this be a year of our renewal, a year we will remember as one in which we

received great grace. Remembering our membership in the Body of Christ, the unshakable Church, let us “be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6-7).

Amen.

**Signed:**

**+ TIKHON**

*Archbishop of Washington, Metropolitan of All America & Canada; Locum tenens of the Diocese of New England & the Albanian Diocese*

**+ NATHANIEL**

*Archbishop of Detroit & the Romanian Episcopate*

**+ BENJAMIN**

*Archbishop of San Francisco & the West*

**+ MARK**

*Archbishop of Philadelphia & Eastern Pennsylvania*

**+ ALEJO**

*Archbishop of Mexico City & Mexico*

**+ MELCHISEDEK**

*Archbishop of Pittsburgh & Western Pennsylvania*

**+ IRÉNÉE**

*Archbishop of Ottawa & the Archdiocese of Canada*

**+ MICHAEL**

*Archbishop of New York & New York and New Jersey*

**+ ALEXANDER**

*Archbishop of Dallas, the South,  
& the Bulgarian Diocese*

**+ PAUL**

*Archbishop of Chicago & the Midwest*

## **A Reader’s Guide to Orthodox Icons: the Baptism of Christ/Theophany Icon**

[iconreader.wordpress.com](http://iconreader.wordpress.com)

From the first century of the Christian Church, there has always been “The Festival of Lights”. In the depth of Midwinter, this feast celebrated the advent of the Son of God’s coming into the world as Jesus Christ, and His early years up to and including His baptism in the Jordan, which heralded the beginning of Jesus’ ministry on earth.

Over the centuries, the various aspects of Christ's early years were separated into individual feasts on different days: His Nativity, the Visitation of the Magi, His presentation in the Temple, and His circumcision. But the principal event of the Feast of Lights – Christ's Baptism – continued to be commemorated on the 6th of January [in the Byzantine Rite]. Why is this event so important?

The event depicted in the icon is that described in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke; here is Matthew's version:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:13-17)

This, then, is the **Epiphany** (revelation) of the Holy Trinity, otherwise known as **Theophany** which literally means a "revelation of God" in Greek (Θεοφάνεια; the Russian is Богоявление and means the same).

The paradox that Jesus Christ might be revealed as God through an act of submittal to a mere man, John, is shown well in the Icon. Though John is baptizing Christ, it is the former who is shown bent over in reverence to the latter. In other icons, John is shown with his face turned toward heaven and beholding the miracle of the Theophany; either way, despite being the baptizer, he is not central to the scene. Near to John is a tree with an axe laid at the root, recalling John's own preaching to those who came to him: "And now also the ax is laid to the root of the trees: therefore every tree which brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." (Matt 3:10). Present in the icon, this shows that whilst the Baptizer must now "decrease so Christ may increase", John's teachings and role are not done away with now the Holy Trinity has

been revealed. On the opposite bank to John the Baptist, angels wait invisibly to receive the newly baptized Christ and clothe Him. And so, on the left is the forerunner of Christ, John, with his sermon of repentance represented by the tree and axe; on the right, the angels wait with reverence to accept the newly revealed Son of God. In the middle – the moment of revelation itself.

Jesus Christ, despite being the one submerged in the Jordan, is shown as though standing up and staring straight at us. His body is depicted as strong and beautiful, as it is understood classically, and in older icons He is naked. Christ appears almost as wide as the river Jordan itself; indeed: it is as though it is Jesus Christ, rather than the river, which cuts a swathe through the rocky wilderness on either side.

The Icon of the Theophany, as well as depicting the Holy Trinity, also answers the question of John the Baptist: I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me? The answer is in what Jesus does with His hands. Whilst in Western art, like the painting by Da Vinci, Jesus is shown as submitting to John's authority, in Orthodox icons Christ's hands are not shown in prayer, but in a sign of blessing. Rather than the waters of Jordan cleansing Christ, it is Christ Who cleans the waters. This is why in the bottom of most Theophany Icons, little creatures appear to be fleeing from the feet of Christ. This is a reflection of the words of the Psalmist regarding the Messiah (Christ): "the sea saw and fled, the Jordan turned back" (Psalm 114:3). The Jordan (usually on the left, represented as an old man) and the Sea (on the right), which is represented as a woman wearing a crown, or as a monster.

This is the depth and profundity of the Baptism of Christ; the feast of lights which revealed the Holy Trinity, and cleansed the waters of baptism so that we, like the fishes shown in the icon, may swim in pure waters.

*Of old, the river Jordan  
Turned back before Elisha's mantle at Elijah's ascension.  
The waters were parted in two  
And the waterway became a dry path.  
This is truly a symbol of baptism  
By which we pass through this mortal life.  
Christ has appeared in the Jordan to sanctify the waters!*

## The Doctrine of Christ:

### **A Layman's Handbook**

by Abp. Dmitri (Royster) of Dallas, 1984

Orthodox Philosopher Teena Blackburn reminds us that *Christian teachings, especially Christian sexual teachings, will not make any sense if you don't know Christ first, and if you don't understand what the Faith says about anthropology: about who Jesus is, what a human is, what life is all about. All that has to come first, or you just get a long list of rules. Christians are following Someone; the pattern of our life is not arbitrary! It is, ideally, rooted in the idea (and experience) that nothing God asks of us is for anything but our good, our joy, our ultimate happiness* (adapted by the editor). In order to help us come to know who Christ is and what the Church teaches us about Christ's divinity and his humanity (a pattern for our humanity!), each month of 2021 we will be looking at a chapter of "The Doctrine of Christ" by the ever-memorable Abp. Dmitri of Dallas (+2011), renowned Orthodox biblical scholar, theologian, missionary, and pastor.

### **Introduction: What is Orthodoxy?**

In order to answer this question, another must first of all be asked. It is the same question which Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself asked His disciples. It is the most important question that has ever been asked.

"What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?" (Mt. 22:42) "Who do men say that I the Son of man am?" (Mt. 16:13) This is the question which must be answered in order to know what Orthodoxy is.

St. Peter answered this question rightly when he replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," (Mt. 16:16), for then Jesus declared that this truth had been revealed to Peter, not by men, but by the heavenly Father.

Christ's whole life and the body of His teachings answered this question for all people and for all times. Who Christ is, and what His mission is, was the truth that He conveyed to His Apostles, the Apostles in turn preserved this teaching intact. Without adding or subtracting, without emphasizing one part of it over another, they passed it on to the next generation in the Church. Even unto the present time, the Church has preserved this truth down through the centuries.

The reason the Church has labored from the beginning to combat errors and to give the doctrine of Christ to every generation in all its purity is because Orthodoxy is, more than anything else, **the right doctrine about Christ**. All of this effort has been made because Christ's teachings about Himself are necessary for the salvation of man and his world.

It was the concern of the Apostles and of the Fathers of the Councils that Christ's teaching about Himself be kept untarnished. Thus, the Scriptures were written, the Creed was composed, and definitions were given in order that this might be so. The Church when referring to the Scriptures, or to the councils and their creeds and definitions, declares: "This is the Orthodox Faith."

A summary of what the Scriptures and, consequently, the councils teach about Christ is sung at the Divine Liturgy. Called the **Hymn of Orthodoxy** [also know as the Hymn of the Incarnation], its every word is of vital importance and of the essence of Orthodoxy:

**Only-begotten Son and Immortal Word of God, who for our salvation didst will to be incarnate of the holy Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, who without change didst become man and wast crucified, O Christ our God, trampling down death by death, who art one of the Holy Trinity, glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit, save us.**

As history and experience have shown, anything less than the whole truth about Christ ends up in utter confusion and the multiplication of the denominations. Just a few years ago there were over three hundred varieties of Christianity in America alone. Most of them have been established or founded on some novel idea about the Lord Himself. Who knows how many more have come into existence since that number was given?

Following the teachings of the Apostles and of the Fathers, there are many other things that need to be said and studied. All of the things that are so characteristic of our Church, the rites, the icons, the veneration of the Mother of God and of the Saints, have as their most important function the support of the this very doctrine of Christ.

Hence, those who would deny any one of these teachings and practices, in effect, deny one part or

another of the doctrine of Christ. In the chapters that follow we shall try, with the Lord's help, to explore this doctrine that is central in the Orthodox Church of Christ, as well as to explain the relationship the "supporting" teachings and practices have to that doctrine.

## Chapter 1: The Symbol of Faith

The Creed, which we recite at every Liturgy, was composed by the First and Second Ecumenical Councils in order to present in a very concise way the most important points of Christian teaching. Its articles are all statements of faith which must be accepted by Orthodox Christians without reservation.

The longest and most detailed part of the Creed is the second part, which summarizes the Church's teachings concerning Jesus Christ. It was, indeed, because almost every element of those teachings was questioned or distorted by someone that the Councils were convoked.

The second part of the Creed is as follows:

**And [I believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of light; true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man; and he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried; and the third day He arose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.**

Every statement is of the essence of Christian Orthodoxy and is clearly taught by the Bible, as the following examination will show.

### § The Son of God:

In answer to Jesus' question, "Whom do ye say that I am?" Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." This identification is accepted by Our Lord and He declares that this truth was

revealed to Peter by the heavenly Father. (Mt. 16:16,17)

### § Only-Begotten:

St. John testifies in his account of the Gospel that the Son was the only begotten of the Father. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." (Jn. 1:18)

### § Begotten of the Father before All Ages:

That the Son was begotten timelessly, before all creation, is reflected in the words of Psalm 2:7, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." These words were understood by the Apostles to refer precisely to Jesus.

"So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an high priest; but He that said unto Him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee." (Heb. 5:5; cf., Acts 13:33 and Heb. 1:5)

Then again, in His prayer before His crucifixion, Jesus asked the Father to glorify Him "with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." (Jn. 17:5)

### § Light of Light:

"God is light." (I Jn. 1:5)

Speaking of John the Baptist, John the Evangelist also says, "He [John] came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light ... he was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That [the Son of God] was the true Light, which lighteth every man ..." (Jn. 1:7-9) In other words, what is said of the Father in this regard is also said of the Son.

### § True God of True God:

The Son of God is God in the same sense as is God the Father. "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." (I Jn. 5:20)

As we see in this passage, the purpose of the coming of the Son of God was to make God known to man. This He could do because He was God Himself. As in the case of the word "light," above, a term, "true," is applied interchangeably to both the Father and the Son.

### § Begotten, Not Made:

One of the major, early heresies (distortions) of

the doctrine of Christ was taught by Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria in Egypt. He taught, as so many twentieth-century Arians (i.e. the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, and many Protestants), that the Son of God was created. This phrase was inserted into the Creed specifically to combat the error of Arius.

### **§ Of one Essence with the Father:**

This is the definitive statement of the divinity of Christ, and therefore the correction of the error mentioned immediately above.

Christ Himself said, "I and my Father are one." (Jn. 10:30) Then too, St. Paul calls Him "the express image of His person [i.e. the being, the essence, the hypostasis of the Father]." (Hb. 1:3)

### **§ By Whom all Things were Made:**

The Son is the expression of the Father; the Father works with the Son as His agent. Hence, the Son was the agent of the creation.

"All things were made by Him [the Son], and without Him was not anything made that was made." (Jn. 1:3) "By whom [i.e. by the Son] also He [God] made the worlds." (Hb. 1:2)

### **§ Who for Us Men and for our Salvation Came Down from Heaven:**

In the Gospel according to John, we find the following. "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." (3:13) The Son came "down" from heaven in this sense: although as God He is always present everywhere, He was present on earth invisibly. When He became man, without ceasing to be God, He was visible and lived among men on earth. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." (Jn. 1:14) "All things were made by Him [the Son], and without Him was not anything made that was made." (Jn. 1:3) "By whom [i.e. by the Son] also He [God] made the worlds." (Hb. 1:2)

It was out of His love for man (Jn. 3:16) that He took human nature upon Himself, so that He might make God known to man (Jn. 1:18), and thus save man from sin (Mt. 1:21) and from the darkness and futility of a godless existence (Lk. 1:79; I Pt. 2:9).

### **§ And was Incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and Became Man:**

St. John testifies to the fact that the Son, or Word, of God became man, and that He continued to be all that He was before. "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (Jn. 1:14)

Mary, a holy virgin of the lineage of Abraham and David, was the human instrument by which God chose to be born and enter into the world of man. His birth was a supernatural one, His mother being a virgin, and His conception being caused by the Holy Spirit.

The Evangelist Luke relates that when the Virgin had asked the Angel who announced the birth to her, "How shall this be, seeing, I know not a man?" the Angel replied to her, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (Lk. 1:34,35)

### **§ And He was Crucified for Us under Pontius Pilate, and Suffered and was Buried:**

The use of the name of Pontius Pilate in the Creed establishes the exact historical time of the crucifixion. Events in Roman times were usually described as having happened during the reign of this or that emperor or governor. St. Paul refers to this event in a letter to Timothy. (I Tm. 6:13)

He was crucified for us. It was again His love that made Him take on the whole miserable human condition and its direct consequence, death. Although He Himself did not sin (I Pt. 2:22), and was therefore not subject to death, He chose to undergo it in order to liberate us from it. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." (I Jn. 1:7) "In [Christ,] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Eph. 1:7)

He suffered as a human being suffers. (I Pt. 2:23) One of the early heresies held that Christ only appeared to have suffered. This heresy in maintained in our own day by the "Christian Scientists."

He was buried, for He was truly dead. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul, in speaking of the fundamental message of Christianity, says, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins

according to the scriptures: and that He was buried" (I Cor. 15:3,4)

**§ And He Ascended into Heaven, and Sits at the Right Hand of the Father:**

"And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." (Lk. 24:51) "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." (Mk. 16:19)

It was again for us that He ascended into heaven, for it was in His manhood (i.e. the human nature which He had taken on) that He ascended. His ascension demonstrates that just as we shall rise from the dead, like Christ, we also shall go, like Him, to heaven to be with Him eternally.

**§ And He shall Come Again with Glory to Judge the Living and the Dead:**

Two angels appeared and spoke to the Apostles at the time of the Lord's ascension, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11)

His second coming will be a glorious one, and its purpose will be to judge all men. "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works." (Mt. 16:27) "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (II Cor. 5:10)

**§ Whose Kingdom shall Have No End:**

Christ's kingdom will be eternal, as we understand from what the angel Gabriel said to the virgin Mary at the Annunciation: "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end." (Lk. 1:31-33)

Thus the Creed, the Symbol of our Faith, is literally taken from the Bible. On this basis the doctrine of Christ can be examined in detail.

*If there are any topics you would like covered in future editions of the Prophet, or if you have any articles which you found to be a blessing, please let Fr. John know!*

# Theophany House Blessings 2021

Given the pandemic, our annual house blessings after the Feast of Holy Theophany will look a little different this year. If you feel comfortable having your home blessed, Fr. John will be JUST blessing the house: wearing a mask, asking you all to wear masks, and departing without the normal socialization, coming and going as soon as possible. If you would like this short blessing, please go to the following link: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C084FADA929ABF94-theophany>. If you do not have an internet connection, please call Fr. John about one of the following dates and times. Alternatively, starting in February, Fr. John will be making virtual visits over Zoom for those who would like the annual visit with Fr. John, **both for those who had their homes blessed and those who did not**. Sign-Up information will be made available later in January. If there is a greater demand for house blessings than expected, the virtual visits may be pushed back into mid-February. Fr. John misses you all, and cannot wait until he can sit down with each and every family during house blessing season next year!

*Note: each time slot allows for 15 minutes for the house blessing, and only 30 minutes is provided for travel between locations; if you live a good distance away from the parish, please consider using one of the final morning/evening slots and be patient if Fr. John arrives a bit late. As Fr. John is not good at refraining from socialization, this schedule will keep him coming and going quickly!*

*PS: If Fr. John doesn't have your address, please include it on the sign-up or email/call him with it.*

## Thursday, Jan. 7

-5:00 PM  
-5:45 PM  
-6:30 PM  
-7:15 PM

## Saturday, Jan. 23

-10:00 AM  
-10:45 AM  
-11:30 AM  
-12:15 PM

## Wednesday, Jan. 27

-10:00 AM  
-10:45 AM  
-11:30 AM  
-12:15 PM

## Friday, Jan. 8

-10:00 AM  
-10:45 AM  
-11:30 AM  
-12:15 PM

## Monday, Jan. 25

-10:00 AM  
-10:45 AM  
-11:30 AM  
-12:15 PM  
-5:00 PM  
-5:45 PM  
-6:30 PM  
-7:15 PM

## Thursday, Jan. 28

-10:00 AM  
-10:45 AM  
-11:30 AM  
-12:15 PM

## Saturday, Jan. 9

-10:00 AM  
-10:45 AM  
-11:30 AM  
-12:15 PM

## Tuesday, Jan. 26

-10:00 AM  
-10:45 AM  
-11:30 AM  
-12:15 PM  
-5:00 PM  
-5:45 PM  
-6:30 PM  
-7:15 PM

## Friday, Jan. 29

-10:00 AM  
-10:45 AM  
-11:30 AM  
-12:15 PM

## Sunday, Jan. 10

-2:00 PM  
-2:45 PM  
-3:30 PM

## Sunday, Jan. 30

-2:00 PM  
-2:45 PM  
-3:30 PM