

Why dost thou turn back thy waters,
 O Jordan? Why dost thou stop thy
 streams, and why dost thou not
 proceed upon thy natural course? 'I
 cannot bear', said he, 'the Fire that
 consumes me. I am filled with wonder
 and with dread before His extreme
 condescension. For I am not used to
 wash him that is clean: I have not
 learnt to bathe the sinless, but to
 purge filthy vessels. Christ who is
 baptized in me teaches me to burn the
 thorns of sin. John, the voice of the
 Word, bears witness with me and
 cries: "Behold the Lamb of God, who
 takes away the sin of the world."
 Unto Him let us the faithful cry aloud:
 O God who art made manifest for
 our salvation, glory to thee.

From the Sixth hour
 of the Forefeast

**Sunday 4 January 2015 is the
 Sunday before the Theophany of
 the Lord**

Matins Gospel: John 20:11-18

Epistle: 2 Timothy 4:5-8

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

**Apolytikion of the Sunday
 before Theophany**

Make ready O Zebulum; Prepare
 yourself O Naphthali; Cease to flow
 O River Jordan; Receive the Master
 who comes to be baptized, in joy.
 Adam, rejoice with the first mother.
 Do not hide in Paradise, as before,
 for He came to see us, even naked,
 that He might clothe us as we were
 before. Christ has appeared to
 renew all creation.

Seasonal Kontakion

In the running waters of the Jordan
 River, on this day the Lord of all
 crieth to John: Be not afraid and
 hesitate not to baptize Me, for I am
 come to save Adam, the first-formed
 man.

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Luke 6:17-23; Galatians 5:22-26; 6:1-2; Matthew 11:27-30
 Eve of Epiphany; Martyrs Theopemptus and Theonas

Tuesday: John 10:1-9; Hebrews 13:17-21; Luke 6:17-23
 Theophany of the Lord; Theophan the Recluse

Wednesday: Luke 24:1-12; Ephesians 5:8-19; Luke 13:10-17
 Synaxis of John the Forerunner; Afterfeast of the Theophany

Thursday: 1 Timothy 5:1-10; Luke 20:27-44
 George of Hozeva; Dominica the Righteous

Friday: Galatians 4:22-27; Luke 8:16-21
 Martyr Polyuctus; Eustratios the Wonderworker

Saturday: 1 Timothy 5:22-25; 6:1-11; Luke 21:5-8, 10-11, 20-24
 Gregory of Nyssa; Dometian, Bishop of Melitene



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

4 January 2015

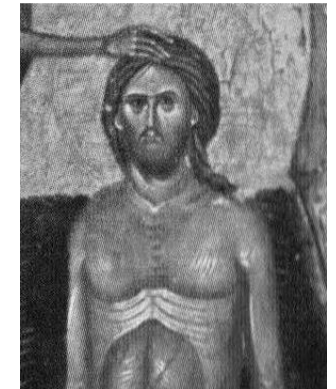
Archbishopric of Good Hope
 Patriarchate of Alexandria & All Africa

The Beginning of the Gospel...

In today's Gospel, we hear the opening words of Saint Mark's Gospel. Unlike Saint Matthew and Saint Luke, Saint Mark does not begin with the accounts of Christ's birth, but rather starts in the desert, where Saint John the Baptist and Forerunner was calling people to repentance. Saint John clearly identified himself with the Old Testament prophets, who called on people to repent of their sins, turn around, and begin a new life, and the Church regards him as the greatest of the prophets. Indeed, he provides a crucial link between the Old Testament and the New.

The call to repentance lies at the heart of our Christian faith, yet its meaning can sometimes be difficult for us to grasp. Many people understand repentance as simply being miserable for one's sins – as if God would want us to be miserable! Others see it as making a huge effort to somehow win favour with God. While repentance certainly involves an element of sorrow for our sins, and while we do need to make an effort to change, the repentance of which the Gospel speaks is deeper than this. True repentance involves an encounter with God which turns our lives around and which is ultimately deeply joyful.

We are all different and so this encounter with God can take many forms, but Saint John was clear that repentance meant a turning to Jesus Christ, and he was preparing his disciples to recognise Christ when He appeared. We do not change our lives by telling ourselves how bad we are, or by trying to be better on our own steam. Rather, we begin to change by encountering the One "who is mightier than I," realising that we are loved by Him, learning to see ourselves as He sees us, and beginning to follow Him in our daily lives, nourished always by His Body, which is the Church.



When the Lord descended today into the waters of the Jordan, He cried aloud to John:
 'Be not afraid to baptize me: for I am come to save Adam the first-formed man.'

From the First hour of the Forefeast of the Theophany

The Great Blessing of the Waters

At Theophany we celebrate the rite of the Great Blessing of the Water, which often happens both inside the Church, in which holy water is blessed for our use, and often also outside the Church, in which the waters of our surrounding environment are blessed. It begins with the chanting of special hymns and the incensing of the water, and concludes with scripture readings, petitions and prayers.

The prayers and readings all seek to manifest the meaning of this great feast, showing how all creation has longed for the coming of Christ and now rejoices in His presence.

Through the Incarnation of Christ, the Son of God has taken on human flesh and He has now manifested Himself in the River Jordan. Through this, He has sanctified all of created reality – everything is now made holy in Him. Everything that has been corrupted and polluted by our human sinfulness is cleansed and purified by the gracious work of God. The corrupting power of Satan is conquered and all that seeks to poison God's good creation is destroyed as all things are once more made new in Him. The service includes the following powerful words:



When our nature was re-made in the Jordan, the most sublime and all-accomplishing Trinity was made manifest, as the archetype of the image in our soul.

Saint Gregory Palamas

Today the grace of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove dwelt upon the waters. Today the Sun that never sets has dawned and the world is made radiant with the light of the Lord. Today the Moon with its radiant beams sheds light on the world. Today the stars formed of light make the inhabited world lovely with the brightness of their splendour. Today the clouds rain down from heaven the shower of justice for mankind. Today the Uncreated by his own will accepts the laying on of hands by his own creature. Today the Prophet and Forerunner draws near, but stands by with fear seeing God's condescension towards us. Today the streams of Jordan are changed into healing by the presence of the Lord. Today all creation is watered by mystical streams. Today the failings of mankind are being washed away by the waters of Jordan. Today Paradise is opened for mortals and the Sun of justice shines down on us. Today the bitter water as once for Moses' people is changed to sweetness by the presence of the Lord. Today we have been delivered from the ancient grief, and saved as the new Israel. Today we have been redeemed from darkness and are filled with radiance by the light of the knowledge of God. Today the gloomy fog of the world is cleansed by the manifestation of our God. Today all creation shines with light from on high.

The Theophany of the Lord

On Tuesday, we celebrate the great feast of the Theophany of Our Lord Jesus Christ. This feast, on which we commemorate Christ's baptism by Saint John the Baptist in the River Jordan, marks the public manifestation of Jesus Christ and the beginning of His ministry. In the Nativity we celebrated the Incarnation of Christ and His coming among us. In His Theophany (sometimes called Epiphany), His true identity is revealed and His glory shines forth for all the world to see.

Saint John the Baptist was in the desert preaching a baptism of repentance. We might wonder, as Saint John himself wondered, why the Sinless One would need to be baptized. Yet Jesus insisted that this was necessary and, in submitting to this baptism, He revealed the very depths of His humility. Not only has He taken on our human flesh in the Incarnation, but in His baptism he identifies Himself with sinful humanity, entering into the depths of our brokenness, in order to take our sins upon Himself and to heal us.

However, in Christ's baptism we see not only His humility, but also His glory. Somehow, His humility and His glory always go together, for the more He pours Himself out for us, the more His glory is revealed. No sooner has Jesus been baptized, than we are told that the Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove, and that a voice from heaven declared: "This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on Him." This is the public manifestation of who Jesus Christ is, the shining forth of His glory for all the world to see. It is the revelation both of the waters that will cleanse us and of the Light that will enlighten us and eventually overcome all darkness.



Jesus sanctified Baptism by being Himself baptized. ... He was baptized not that He might receive remission of sins, for He was sinless. Being sinless, He was baptized, that He might give to them that are baptized a divine and excellent grace. *Since the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise partook of the same* (Heb. 2:14). This was so that, having been made partakers of His presence in the flesh we might be made partakers also of His Divine grace. Thus Jesus was baptized, that thereby we again by our participation might receive both salvation and honour.

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem