



Today the Church also commemorates **Saint Basil the Great**. He was born into a prominent Christian family in fourth century Cappadocia and after studying rhetoric in Athens he returned to Cappadocia where he embarked on a monastic life, together with his friend Gregory, who would become Saint Gregory the Theologian. However, he was called to Caesarea to assist the bishop as a priest and in 370 was elected bishop. Saint Basil made a major contribution to the defence of the Orthodox faith and the explanation of the Church's theology, especially in his work *On the Holy Spirit*. But he was also a pastoral leader and is known for his defence of the poor and his care for his flock in times of crisis. In many places the feast of Saint Basil is associated with the *Vasilópita*, or Saint Basil's bread, a sweet bread often with a coin inside it, which is blessed and cut following the Divine Liturgy.



1 January is the Feast of the Circumcision of Jesus Christ

Matins Gospel: Luke 24:36-53

Epistle: Colossians 2:8-12

Gospel: Luke 2:20-21, 40-52

Apolytikion of the Circumcision of Christ:
Our human form hast Thou taken on Thyself without change, O greatly-compassionate Master, though being God by nature; fulfilling the Law, Thou willingly receivest circumcision in the flesh, that Thou mightest end the shadow and roll away the veil of our sinful passions. Glory be to Thy goodness unto us. Glory be to Thy compassion. Glory, O Word, to Thine inexpressible condescension.

Kontakion of the Circumcision of Christ:
Now the Lord of all that is doth undergo circumcision, in His goodness cutting off the sins and failings of mortals. He this day doth give salvation unto the whole world; and the hierarch and bright daystar of the Creator now rejoiceth in the highest, Basil the wise and divine initiate of Christ.

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday, 2 January: Hebrews 5:4-10; John 3:1-15
Forefeast of Epiphany Begins; Pope Sylvester

Tuesday, 3 January: Acts 10:44-48; 11:1-10; John 1:18-28
Prophet Malachi; Martyr Gordios

Wednesday, 4 January: 1 Corinthians 4:9-16; John 1:18-28
Synaxis of the 70 Apostles; Theoctistus the Righteous

Thursday, 5 January: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27; Luke 3:1-18
Eve of Epiphany; Martyrs Theopemptus & Theonas

Friday, 6 January: Mark 1:9-11; Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7; Matthew 3:13-17
Holy Epiphany; Theophan the Recluse

Saturday, 7 January: Acts 19:1-8; John 1:29-34
Synaxis of John the Forerunner; Afterfeast of the Theophany



Evangelion

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Archbishopric of Good Hope

Patriarchate of Alexandria & All Africa

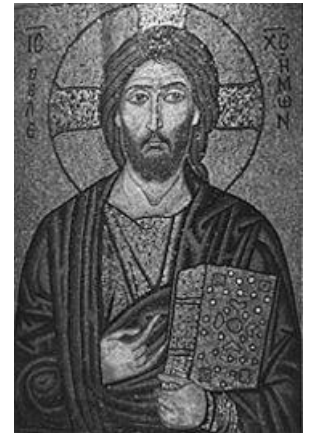
The Circumcision of the Lord

Today, on the eighth day after the Nativity, which is also the first day of the civil New Year, the Church commemorates the circumcision of Jesus Christ. Saint Luke tells us that He was not only circumcised, but was given the name Jesus, which means Saviour. And the Child grew, “and the favor of God was upon him.”

We might wonder why Jesus needed to be circumcised. Saint Luke tells us that He did so in order to fulfill the Law of Moses (2:39), and the Fathers teach us that He did this in order to totally identify Himself with us in order to save us. For, as Saint Paul tells us, we too are circumcised in Him (Colossians 2:11). The circumcision of Christ both fulfills the Law and abolishes it, for by His death and resurrection Jesus Christ inaugurates a new circumcision, namely baptism.

Circumcision had been instituted by Joshua in the Old Testament as a foreshadowing of what was to come. Just as Joshua was seen by the Fathers as foreshadowing Jesus, so the circumcision that he instituted while the people of Israel were wandering in the wilderness foreshadowed our baptism. Just as it served to set the people of Israel apart so that they could live a new life, so our baptism incorporates us into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, cleansing us of sin, and enabling us to live a new life in Him.

However, this new circumcision that we are incorporated into in baptism is not a physical thing, but is what Saint Paul calls “a circumcision of the heart” (Romans 2:29), which is not just a once-off affair. Saint Bede the Venerable refers to it as “this daily circumcision of ours, that is, the continual cleansing of the heart.” We have been given an astoundingly great gift in baptism, but it is a gift that needs to be renewed in us each day. As we begin a new year, let us pray that God will help us to truly enter into our hearts and find Him there in an ever-new way.



Abba Poeman said concerning Abba Pior that every day
he made a new beginning.

From the Sayings of the Desert Fathers

The Icon of the Theophany of the Lord

In the icon of the Baptism of Christ, we see the Church's understanding of this great event, for an icon reflects the Church's faith and invites us to enter into that faith in a deeper way.

This icon reveals two fundamental mysteries. Firstly, there is the revelation of the Holy Trinity who reveals Himself on this day – through the voice of the Father and through the descent of the Holy Spirit on Christ in the form of a dove. Secondly, there is the revelation of the mystery of baptism, through which we and all creation are purified and renewed.



We see these mysteries expressed in the icon. At the top, there is a segment of a circle which represents the heavens which had been closed by the sin of Adam, but which are now opened by Christ. This signifies the presence of God, and we see rays of light that shine upon the Saviour, together with the dove which represents the Holy Spirit who comes to rest on Him. For the Fathers of the Church, the dove is a reminder of the dove that had heralded the end of the flood. (Genesis 8:11-12)

Like the icon of the Nativity, the events of this icon are situated in the desert, representing the desert of our estrangement from God. And, just as His Nativity was situated in a cave, so too Christ is shown here in the river which forms a cave around Him, pointing to the darkness of our world and to the tomb and the depths of hell into which He will descend in order to save us.

This watery tomb evokes the imagery of water found in the Old Testament. On the one hand, water is a symbol of chaos, death and destruction, as

seen in the Flood. But this imagery is also used to express our longing for the Living Water which is our longing for Christ Himself. In the icon of the Baptism of Christ, we often see two small figures in the water. The one is a man who represents the Jordan River which the Prophet Elisha turned back with his mantel, prefiguring our own baptism. And the other is a woman who represents the sea and refers to that other prefiguration of Baptism, namely the crossing of the Red Sea.

The icon shows Christ covered by the water, but He is shown as standing or walking in order to show that He is in control. He blesses the waters of the Jordan, sanctifying them by His immersion, and from then on the water becomes an image not of death, but of new life.



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 Baptism of the Lord

On Friday we celebrate the great feast of the Theophany of the Lord. This feast, when 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 this Theophany (sometimes also called His 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 baptised. Yet Jesus insisted that this was necessary and, in submitting to 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. 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 baptised, 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.



As You were baptised in the Jordan, Lord, the voice of the Trinity was made 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 sureness of the word. Christ our God, who appeared and enlightened the world, glory to You.

Apolytikion for Theophany

The Great Blessing of the Water

At Theophany we celebrate the rite of the Great Blessing of the Water, which often occurs both inside and outside the Church. In this rite, holy water is blessed for our use, and the waters of our surrounding environment are also blessed. This Blessing 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 transmit 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.