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January 6, 2019: The Theophany of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

The Orthodox Celebration of Theophany

By Professor John Fountoulis

On January 6th our Church celebrates the great despotic feast of "Theophany" or "Epiphany" or "Holy Lights". The forefeast begins the day after New Year, January 2nd. In this preparatory period is found the "Sunday Before the Lights". This fits into the functional forefeast preparation. In the Gospel reading from the Divine Liturgy on this Sunday we hear: "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" from the prologue of the Gospel of Mark, who narrates the appearance of John the Forerunner in the Jordan desert, preaching and prophesying about Christ. John baptized "in water", one "more powerful" than him though, Who came "before him", He will baptize people "in the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:1-8). In the four-day forefeast period, from the 2nd until the 5th of January, the services are stacked with canons, triodia and other forefeast sacred hymns. We have here the "Holy Week" of the Lights, like we saw during Christmas, with the difference that the time of preparation here is less due to the extension of the feast of Christmas until Dec. 31st and the feast of the Circumcision of Christ on Jan. 1st. Again the similarities with the Services of Holy Week are evident, precisely because of the paralleling of the feast of the Theophany with that of Pascha. Again the preparation culminates on the eve with the bright Services of Great Hours and Great Vespers of the feast. The celebration is extended eight days after the feast, including three special days - the day after Theophany with the Synaxis of Saint John the Forerunner and Baptist of Christ on Jan. 7th, the "Sunday After the Lights", and the last day of the feast, the apodosis (leave-taking) on Jan. 14th, at which time also is chanted the entire service of the feast. In this excellent liturgical framework shines the great despotic celebration of the Theophany on Jan. 6th. Its origin is similar to the celebration of Christmas. On Jan. 6th was celebrated in the old calendar the winter solstice by the people of Egypt and Arabia. At the beginning of the third century followers of the heretic Basilides attempted to replace the pagan celebration of this feast with the baptism of Christ. **(Cont. on back left panel)**

EPISTLE READING:
St. Paul's Letter to Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

TITUS, my son, the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of the great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

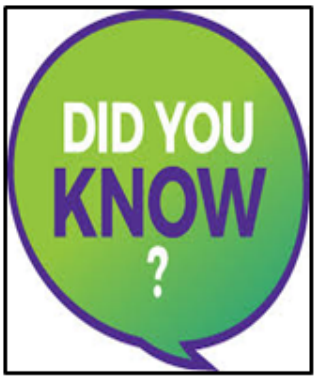
GOSPEL READING:
The Gospel According to Matthew 3:13-17

At that time, Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

SPRING PARISH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (GA)

March 10th after Liturgy

Save the date for an important vote about the future of **YOUR parish**!!



Our Greek Dance Group has gotten so big that we have a **youth AND teenage troupe**! The problem? They have **no space** to practice properly. If this is not the future you want for your children, **donate to the Capital Campaign**. Give your kids the proper facilities to learn and grow. Donate via check or on our website. Join the movement **TODAY**!

You can find a copy of our Sunday bulletin on our website at www.hagoc.org under "Bulletin".

Thank you to our **GOYA** teenage group for sponsoring today's coffee hour.

GUIDELINES FOR RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION:

Holy Communion is offered in the Orthodox Church only to those individuals baptized and Chrismated (Confirmed) in the Orthodox Faith. One must be in good standing with the Church spiritually (for example, married people must have had their marriage blessed in the Church; and, all must be without grave sin on their hearts). For all Orthodox Christians, the proper preparation for Holy Communion must be observed: that is, examination of conscience, confession, reading the prayers for Holy Communion, and the proper fasting and abstinence prior to Holy Communion. If you have any further questions about this, please speak with our Parish Priest. Women should remove all lipstick when approaching for Holy Communion.

Philoptochos Meeting. TODAY Upstairs After Liturgy
Contact Alexis Cleveland (apcphiloptochos@gmail.com)

Hope & Joy Meeting. January 7th 6:30-7:30pm at church
Contact Ashley Joiner (ashleydjoiner@gmail.com)

Philoptochos Afternoon Tea January 12th, 1-3pm at church
Ladies young and old, learn about our philanthropic work and help us to find new ways to fulfill our mission to help those in need.

GOYA New Year Celebration Party, January 12th, 7pm Home of the Economou family
All teenagers are invited to celebrate the new year! Contact Lia Economou, GOYA Advisor, for details: (liaecon@comcast.net).

PAREA (Our Company of Friends) Lunch, January 15th 11:30am at Olive Garden 45970 Waterview Plaza, Sterling
RSVP to Marina (571-969-9234).

Weekly Liturgical Schedule for January

Jan. 7 St. John the Baptist, 8:15 AM Orthros, 9:30 AM Divine Liturgy
Jan. 17 St. Anthony 8:15 AM Orthros, 9:30 AM Divine Liturgy
Jan. 30 Three Hierarchs 8:15 AM Orthros, 9:30 AM Divine Liturgy

(Cover message cont. from front) Shortly afterwards the Church of the East set Jan. 6th as the feast day of Epiphany, or Theophany. The apostle Paul speaks of "the glorious epiphany (appearing or manifestation) of our great God" (Tit. 2:13). Elsewhere he stresses that through Christ "the grace of God epiphanied (appeared or manifested) saving all people" (Tit. 2:11). Under the expressions of the Apostle of the Nations are acknowledged the known national terms "theophany" and "epiphany", which meant the appearing among people of the deity or god-emperor in a particular city. With the epiphany of false gods and emperors, the Christian Church opposed this with the epiphany of the true God and King Christ, the true theophany. Also the worship of the sun, which conquers during the winter solstice the darkness of night, was opposed with the worship of the true sun, Christ, who rose, as the prophet Isaiah said, in a world sitting in darkness and shadows. "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined" (Isa. 8:23-9:2). However the meaning of the theophany or the epiphany of Christ was not connected to only a single historical fact of His life. We saw that Basilides and his followers celebrated on Jan. 6th the Baptism at the Jordan, in which, according to their heretical teaching, divinity incarnated in Christ. But according to the Orthodox teaching of baptism it is the beginning, the first public appearance and prominence of Jesus as Messiah and Savior. As such He was recognized by the representative of the Old Testament, the prophet John the Forerunner who saw the Holy Spirit "descending and resting upon Him" (Jn. 1:32-34) and heard the voice of the Father: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17; Mrk. 1:11; Lk. 3:22), assuring him of the sonship. At the baptism the Son/God appeared, but God/Trinity was also revealed, as the poet sings in the apolytikion of the feast chanting: "In Jordan You were baptized, O Lord, and the veneration of the Trinity was manifested." The Son was baptized, the Father's voice was heard and the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove. At the Jordan the Trinity was manifested. But with the birth of Christ God is manifested to the world. Therefore it was celebrated at the same time as the feast of the baptism on Jan. 6th. Christ, perfect God and perfect man, also had to have everything perfect and complete that arose in His life on earth. Perfect therefore should be the years of His earthly life and not missing. It is estimated that He died on the cross on April 6th. This should have been, according to the above calculations , the day of his conception by the Virgin Mary, the Annunciation. Thus His birth after nine full months should coincide with Jan. 6th. He was baptized "when He was beginning to be about thirty years of age" according to the evangelist Luke (3:23), that is again on Jan. 6th, if perfection required here the full number of years of His birth as on the day of His entry into… (**Cont. on next panel**)

(Cover message cont. from left) public ministry. Related to the events of the birth of Christ and the manifestation of the Divinity of Christ, is the worship of the shepherds and the Magi's offering of gifts. The first were the representatives of the Jewish people and the second the beginning of the idolaters. And the celebration of these two events came to enrich the theme of the celebration of Theophany. The events celebrated already became four. But we have a fifth Theophany event; His first miracle at Cana of Galilee, where during the marriage feast He changed water into wine. The revelation of divine glory to Christ's disciples, the beginning of His signs, the miracle of the wedding of Cana, was added to the other four festive themes. The first two festive themes prevailed however, the birth and baptism of Christ co-celebrated on Jan. 6th, and this remained long in the East and so far has been preserved in the Armenian Church. When in the fourth century Rome and the East began to celebrate Christmas on Dec. 25th and this gradually prevailed there, the contents of the eortologion for Theophany split. Christmas celebrated the birth and Theophany the baptism at the Jordan. This is precisely the subject of today's feast of the Theophany. The splitting of the epiphanies allowed more depth for their developments. The baptism of the Lord, the Theophany, the prototypes in the Old Testament, its expansion and its consequences in the life of the Church, gave wonderful and rich themes to the poets of the prayers and hymns of the feast and to the holy commemorators. Of particular brilliance is the Service of the Great Blessing of the Waters, which is celebrated twice - on the eve and after the Divine Liturgy of the feast. It is a vivid depiction of the baptism of Christ. First, Christ is baptized and sanctifies the created waters to create through them the new world, the New Creation, new people, faithful Christ-bearers and God-bearers. In the pannychida of the Theophany, after the blessing of the water and the communion and the sprinkling of believers, the catechumens were baptized. It was the feast of "the Lights". The "illumination" - the baptism of Christ and Christians. In the Service of Matins for the feastday in the eirmos of the first canon, the poet Kosmas the bishop of Maiouma, in the second ode, combines in a remarkable way the themes of each ode to the theme of the feast: the crossing of the Red Sea through water for the salvation of the people; the upholding of the humble Anna and the defeat of the dragon by the omnipotent God in the water of baptism; the prophetic voice of Habakkuk and the Baptist's voice of one crying in the wilderness; the peaceful preaching of Isaiah and the salvation of Adam's work by the peacemaker Christ in the Jordan; the lament "in sorrow" of Jonah and the Baptist's preaching of repentance; the dew of the furnace of Babylon, the immaterial fire which accepted the kennels of the River Jordan, and the hymnology to the Mother of the one baptized. All this, Old and New Testaments, type and truth, are intertwined in a supra-cosmic marriage. (Source: Translated by John Sanidopoulos)