From The Ambvon

ST MICHAEL ORTHODOX CHURCH
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SUNDAY, JANUARY 4

30th Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday before Theophany. Tone 5. Forefeast of Theophany. Synaxis of the 70 apostles.

Birthdays & Anniversaries for January

Birthdays: Gregory Krenitsky (1/9); Margaret Pregmon (1/17); Paula Stavisky (1/17); Dr Eli Stavisky (1/22)
Nameday: Emilia Hart (1/1); Emilia Krenitsky (1/1); Matushka Emilia Shepherd (1/1); Silas Hart (1/4); Rodion Shepherd (1/4); Maximus Shepherd (1/21); Gregory Krenitsky (1/25); Savina Shepherd (1/30)
Prosphora Schedule: PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE HELP! We need families to start baking prosphora at home. Please sign up. *The Church has a prosphora kit if you would like to borrow it. THE CHURCH NEEDS YOUR HELP. THIS IS AN OFFERING FOR THE PEOPLE BY THE PEOPLE. Thank you Matushka for today's offering.*
Jan 4th
Jan 6th

Counting: HELP! Please sign up and count our donations. Please stay and help.
Jan 4th
Jan 11th
Jan 18th

PLEASE SING ALONG! *Singing the hymns and responses to the litanies throughout the services is encouraged!*

Coffee Hour/Agape Meal: *Please stay and join us for a cup of coffee so we may break bread with each other. This will allow us to get to know each other and see how we can help each other.*

DEAR GUESTS AND FRIENDS: *A most sincere and heartfelt welcome to you from our community. According to the ancient traditions of the Orthodox Church, the Sacrament of Holy Communion is to be administered only to Orthodox Christians who have prepared themselves by prayer, fasting, and a recent (monthly) confession. If you have questions please ask Fr Michael! Visitors, if you did not introduce yourself to Fr Michael at Vespers, please refrain from Holy Communion.*

Service Schedule

SAT, Jan 3rd @ 5:00 PM Great Vespers
SUN, Jan 4th: Hours @ 9:10 AM Hours & Divine Liturgy, 28th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST — Tone 3. Eve of Theophany . Sunday before Theophany.
MON, Jan 5th Royal Hours @9:00 AM & @ 5:00 PM Compline and Matins w/Litya for Theophany & Great Blessing of the Water
TUES, Jan 6th Divine Liturgy of St Basil @ 9 AM
THE HOLY THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

Parish Prayer List

NEWLY DEPARTED:

DEPARTED: Helen Wirhanowsky (1/10); Marie Morek (1/15); Ned Matechak (1/20); Helen Sokol (1/25); Helen Bezuhly (1/27); Margaret Jadick (1/29); Margaret Cushner (1/29);

Please remember in your prayers LIVING:
Ill-afflicted *Archpriest(s) John Nightingale,* & *Theodore* Orzolek

All those caring for the sick and suffering at this time throughout the world, especially our families and friends: *Edward* Sevensky, *Margaret* Pregmon, *Daniel* Jones, *Michae*l Sokol, *Michael* Krenitsky, *Bernie* Elko, *Nadia* Macheska, *The child of God Abigail, Helen* Wytovich, *Marie* Pasternak, *Eli & Paula* Stavisky, *Derek, Natalie* Kelley, Maura & Uriel

Servants of God: *Mark* Bezhuly, *David & Kathy* Barsigian, *Alexa* Barsigian & *Bobby* Wolfel, *Patricia* Jones, *Anne* Buday, *Emily* Krenitsky, *Gregory* Krenitsky, *Barbara* Sevensky, *Beverly* Elko, *Nicole* Earl, *Anna* Tyrpak, *Sandy & Danny* Pregmon, *Walter & Marie* Pritchyk, *Michael & Euphemia* Keklak, *Justin & Elisabeth* Kane, *Maria & Vitaliy* Rakovsky, *Ekaterina & Anna*, *Joe & Kelly* Cigna, *George, Natasha, Rosa, & Lucia* Coyoy, *Mat. Emilia, Reader Blaise, Maximus, Rodion, Savina* Shepherd, *Joseph, Emilia, Judah, Nadezda, & Silas* Hart, *Tammy* Wytovich, *Paulette* Ezbiansky, *Uriel* Vo *& Maura* Elko, *Mary* Krevko, *Elisabeth & Jacob* Hallford and their newly born child *Juliette*, *Tammy, Justin, Niko, & Katya* Williams, *Paul* Dunay, *Anastasia, Sophia, & Luke, Darlene* Shaffer, *Vanessa, Sophia, & Cameron* Polzella, David Jadick, Sandra Condone, Holly Granville

Seekers: *Vincent* Bonello, Zachary Nikl

Catechumens: *Christopher* Yeisley, *Gabriel* Mears, *Maxim* Granville

Treasury "... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." Jesus Christ

How Much is my tithe

Weekly	2%	4%	5%	10%
$200	$4	$8	$10	$20
$500	$10	$20	$25	$50
$750	$15	$30	$37	$75
$1000	$20	$40	$50	$100
$1500	$30	$60	$75	$150

WEEKLY GIVING UPDATE: We thank you for your continued giving in gratitude for all that our loving God does for each of us, for His Holy Church, **and** all the blessings we receive through her.

DEC Income: $14,928.00

Today Readings

Epistle: (298) 2 Timothy 4:5-8 (Sunday Before Theophany)
Gospel:(1) Mark 1:1-8 (Sunday Before Theophany)

EPISTLE
Deacon: Let us attend!
Priest: Peace be unto all!
Reader: And to thy spirit.
Deacon: Wisdom!
Reader: The Prokeimenon in the 6th Tone, a Psalm of David: O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance.
Choir: O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance.
Reader: To Thee, O Lord, will I call. O my God, be not silent to me.
Choir: O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance.
Reader: O Lord, save Thy people
Choir: And bless Thine inheritance.

Deacon: Wisdom!
Reader: The reading from the Epistle of the Holy Apostle Paul to Timothy.
Deacon: Let us attend!

[(298) 2 Timothy 4:5-8] Timothy, my son: Always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill thy ministry. * For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. * I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. * Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Priest: Peace be unto thee, Reader.
Reader: And to thy spirit.

ALLELUIA
Deacon: Wisdom!
Reader: The Alleluia in the 8th Tone: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!
Choir: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!
Reader: O God, be bountiful to us and bless us, show the light of Thy countenance upon us, and have mercy on us.
Choir: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!
Reader: That we may know Thy way upon the earth, and Thy salvation among all nations.
Choir: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

GOSPELS
[(1) Mark 1:1-8] The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. * As it is written in the prophets, "Behold, I send My messenger before Thy face, who shall prepare Thy way; * the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight -- " * John was baptizing in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. * And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. * Now John was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. * And he preached, saying, "After me comes He Who is mightier than I, the thong of Whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. * I have baptized you with water; but He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

2 Timothy 4:7 I Have Kept the Faith
CONSOLATION. ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM: He is desirous to console the despondency of his disciple and therefore bids him be of good cheer, since he was going to his crown, having finished all his work and obtained a glorious end.… As a father whose son was sitting nearby, bewailing his orphan state, might console him, saying, Weep not, my son; we have lived

a good life, we have arrived at old age, and now we leave you.… These things then he wrote to console Timothy. Indeed the whole epistle is full of consolation and is a sort of testament. HOMILIES ON 2 TIMOTHY 9.

2 Timothy 4:8 The Crown of Righteousness

THE MARTYR'S STRUGGLE. ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM: The martyr's own struggles surpass our mortal nature. The prizes they won go beyond our powers and understanding. They laughed at the life lived on earth. They trampled underfoot the punishment of the rack. They scorned death and took wing to heaven. They escaped from the storms of temporal things and sailed into a calm harbor. They brought with them no gold or silver or expensive garments. They carried along no treasure which could be plundered but the riches of patience, courage and love. Now they belong to Paul's choral band while they still await their crowns, because they have escaped henceforth the uncertainty of the future. DISCOURSES AGAINST JUDAIZING CHRISTIANS 6.1.

Gorday, P., ed. (2000). *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (pp. 274–275). InterVarsity Press.

Mark 1:6a *Clothed with Camel's Hair*

SPIRITUAL FOOD IN THE DESERT. ST CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: The blessed John disdained hair obtained from flocks of sheep as smelling of luxury. Instead he chose camel's hair, making his life's pattern one of simplicity and frugality. For he also "ate locusts and wild honey," sweet and spiritual food, preparing for the humble and self-controlled ways of the Lord. How could John have possibly worn a purple robe? He was one who avoided all false pretenses of the city and lived a calm existence in the desert apart from all frivolous pursuits, from anything ignoble or mean. CHRIST THE EDUCATOR 2.11.

THE EFFECT OF JOHN'S PREACHING ON CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE. ST JEROME: John the Baptist had a religious mother and his father was a priest. Yet neither his mother's affection nor his father's affluence could induce him to live in his parents' house at the risk of the world's temptations. So he lived in the desert. Seeking Christ with his eyes, he refused to look at anything else. His rough garb, his girdle made of skins, his diet of locusts and wild honey were all alike designed to encourage virtue and continence. Later the spiritual descendants of the prophets, who were the monks of the Old Testament, would build for themselves huts by the waters of Jordan and forsaking the crowded cities live in these on pottage and wild herbs. As long as you are at home, make your cell your paradise, gather there the varied fruits of Scripture, let them be your favorite companions, and take its precepts to your heart. LETTER 125, TO RUSTICUS 7.

Oden, T. C., & Hall, C. A., eds. (1998). *Mark (Revised)* (pp. 6–7). InterVarsity Press.

Announcements - Upcoming Parish & Diocesan Events

Church Attendance

Jan 3, Saturday Vespers 10
Jan 4, Sunday Liturgy
Communed

Receptions: With the blessing of His Eminence, Archbishop Mark we will have 5 baptisms this month! Dates will be forthcoming! Please pray for Maxim, Christopher, Gabriel, Cameron, & Juilette and their families as they prepare for the sacrament of baptism.

Silent Prayers and Confession: Every Wednesday 11:00AM - 1:30PM or you can make an appt for confession.

Parish Council Meeting: The next one is Jan 11th

Church Work Day: Once a QTR. Next date TBD.

Monthly Panikhida: Jan 31st, 4PM prior to Vespers

Remember that at the Great Entrance after each petition the priest will say "may the Lord God remember thee in His Kingdom……," the people should respond with "Amen." And at the end of the petitions, the priest will raise the chalice and say "You and all Orthodox Christians, may the Lord God remember thee in His Kingdom…… the people respond with "And to thy Holy Priesthood (Episcopacy), may the Lord God remember thee in His Kingdom always now and ever unto ages of ages." This is dialogue, a prayer if you will, between the concelebrant and the people.

Choir practice: Saturday's @ 4pm prior to vespers. If you would like to sing in the choir please make every effort to be at the practice.

WISH LIST! Please consider purchasing from our wish list as this will reduce our cost of expenses and will allow us to increase and focus our giving in other vital areas needed. Currently we are looking for small wooden boxes that we can dedicate at reliquaries. https://www.myregistry.com/giftlist/stmichaelsorthodoxchurcholdforgewishlist

St. Michael's Greeters Ministry *"I was a stranger, and you welcomed me."* Matthew 25:35 Our objective is to welcome visitors to the Parish, help them "feel at home" during the worship service, provide them with information about Orthodoxy and the Parish, invite them to Parish activities, introduce them to people of like interests, invite them back, follow-up to thank them for visiting us, and identifying whether we can help them in the future. Most people leave a church once they enter because no one greeted them. Please sign up to greet people.

STOMC Mens Group! New details coming!

Please sign up for coffee hour! There are sign up sheets downstairs by the offering basket. Also, please donate at coffee hour. Donate what you would spend on a cup of coffee. This is to replenish our plastic wear and supplies for coffee hour.

Please start thinking about volunteering for the **Diocesan Assembly** which will be held here at SMOC on Jan 29th & 30th.

HOUSE BLESSING: During the days following the Feast of the Theophany (January 6th), it is customary for the Priest to visit the homes of his parishioners, bringing with him the "Jordan Water" for the traditional Theophany House Blessing. The First Great Sanctification of Water is performed at the end of the Divine Liturgy on the eve of the Feast of Theophany (January 5th). While that water may be given to the faithful to drink on that day and throughout the coming year, traditionally it is only the water from the Second Great Sanctification, which is performed on the day of the Feast of Theophany (January 6th), that is called "Jordan Water" and used for the Theophany House Blessing. Please schedule with Fr Michael to have your house blessed.

Dear Faithful,
Christ is born!
Glorify Him!

It is that time of year again! Your parish council is preparing for our Annual Meeting. IAW our bylaws our annual meeting will be on Februay 8, 2026 and we have asked for an amendment to this date.

With the blessing of His Eminence, Archbishop Mark we asked that you discern and think about the following amendment to parish bylaws:

ARTICLE FOUR: THE PARISH MEETING

1) Meetings.

a) Parish meeting. The parish meeting shall be the highest administrative body of the Parish, and all major decisions of the Parish, not within the particular authority of the Metropolitan or Diocesan Authority, shall be made by the Parish at its annual or special meeting.

i) Annual Meeting. The annual parish meeting shall be held on the second Sunday of February.

To be amended to: ……..i) Annual Meeting. The annual parish meeting shall be held on the second Sunday of January.

Troparion – Tone 4

Commanders of the heavenly hosts, / we who are unworthy beseech you, / by your prayers encompass us beneath the wings of your immaterial glory, / and faithfully preserve us who fall down and cry to you: / "Deliver us from all harm, for you are the commanders of the powers on high!"

Kontakion – Tone 2

Commanders of God's armies and ministers of the divine glory, / princes of the bodiless angels and guides of mankind, / ask for what is good for us, and for great mercy, / supreme commanders of the Bodiless Hosts.

The Significance of Theophany in Orthodox Christianity

As I delve deeper into the importance of Theophany, it's essential to understand the profound impact it has on the spiritual lives of Orthodox Christians. This feast is far more than a mere commemoration; it's a celebration of **Jesus Christ's baptism** in the Jordan River. This event marks the **manifestation of God as the Holy Trinity** to the world — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — providing a profound revelation of Divine truth that resonates with believers.

Theophany stands as a pivotal point where heaven meets earth. During the liturgical services, I've witnessed the vivid imagery used to illustrate this junction, especially through the **Great Blessing of the Waters**. This ritual is not only about purification but also signifies the sanctification of the entire creation. Orthodox theology teaches that when the waters are blessed, they become a means of spiritual renewal, symbolizing the washing away of sins.

Indeed, every aspect of Theophany is imbued with deep symbolism which adherents internalize and reflect upon. The icons depicting the feast portray the voice of God the Father proclaiming Jesus as His beloved Son, the Holy Spirit descending as a dove, and the figures of angels in awe. These are not just static images but invitations for us to contemplate the mystery of God becoming manifest in the world.

Orthodox Christians believe that participating in Theophany services invokes a renewal of their own baptismal vows. The prayers and hymns are designed to draw us closer to the heart of our faith, where I've felt a personal call to embrace the transformative teachings of the gospel. It's during Theophany that we reaffirm our commitment to live a life in accordance with Christ's example.

By observing Theophany, I'm reminded of the unity between the cosmic and the personal elements of my faith. The feast illustrates that salvation history is not confined to the past but is an ongoing narrative that continues within the life of every believer. Through this understanding, we grasp the scope of God's redemptive work, which is both intimate and universal.

The Roots of Theophany in Christian Tradition

The history of Theophany stretches back to the earliest days of Christianity. In the Christian tradition, the feast commemorates not only Christ's baptism but also His first public manifestation to the world. **Theophany's origins are tightly interwoven with the liturgical traditions** that emerged in the early Church.

Liturgical records from as early as the 4th century detail the observance of the feast, illustrating its **ancient roots and enduring importance**. It was considered a major feast, sometimes even correlated with the celebration of Easter, accentuating its significance in the context of Christian redemptive events.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, Theophany is often referred to as 'Epiphany,' a term that signifies a divine revelation. The feast is deeply rooted in the scriptural accounts of the Gospels, particularly in the works of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These texts detail the event of Jesus's baptism by John the Baptist at the Jordan River, marking it as an occasion where the **Heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended** like a dove upon Jesus, while a voice from Heaven proclaimed Him as the beloved Son.

Celebrated on January 6th, this feast not only observes the baptism but also **Christ's first miracle** at the wedding of Cana, which occurs shortly thereafter according to the Gospel of John. This dual focus on baptism and miracle underscores the multifaceted nature of divine manifestation and the profound mystery of God's presence.

Orthodox Christians recognize this event as a cornerstone of their faith, as it reveals the Trinity — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — to the world, and establishes the foundation for the sacrament of baptism. By looking at the roots of Theophany and its establishment in the early Christian Church, one gains a deeper appreciation for its central place in Orthodox ritual and doctrine. It continues to resonate through centuries as a powerful expression of faith, an acknowledgement of the divine mystery, and a call to a life transformed by the recognition of Jesus Christ's divinity.

The Baptism of Jesus Christ: A Pivotal Moment

In the rich tapestry of Orthodox Christianity, the Feast of Theophany stands out, particularly for its commemoration of the **baptism of Jesus Christ**. This moment in the Jordan River signifies far more than a mere ritual. It marks the beginning of Christ's public ministry and the divine approval of his mission on Earth. When I reflect upon this event, I'm moved by its profound significance, encapsulated in the voice from heaven declaring Jesus as the beloved Son.

Scripture recounts this pivotal moment with poignant clarity. As Saint John the Baptist lowers Jesus into the waters, the heavens open, and the Holy Spirit descends like a dove — a scene capturing the full revelation of God's triune nature. The baptism thus serves as a direct manifestation of the Trinity, fortifying the relevance of Theophany in today's observances.

Beyond its doctrinal import, the baptism also symbolizes a model for personal transformation. In Orthodox tradition, followers re-commit to spiritual renewal, mirroring the purifying act that Jesus himself underwent. This moment beckons the faithful to embody Christ's virtues and fosters a profound connection to his journey.

Moreover, the baptism induces a **ripple effect throughout the liturgical year**. It's not merely an isolated event but a gateway to the subsequent narratives of Christ's life and teachings. Each year, as I celebrate this feast, I'm reminded of the seasons that follow — each echoing the resonant themes introduced by the baptism.

As the story of the baptism unfolds, the multifaceted themes interwoven in the Theophany celebration emerge starkly. Through liturgy and iconography, the Orthodox Church encapsulates the transformative power of water, the inauguration of Christ's ministry, and a life led by example. These threads bind the observance, not only to the past but also to our contemporary journey in faith. The baptism of Jesus Christ remains an enduring call to renew and deepen our spiritual lives in alignment with the core precepts of Orthodoxy.

The Symbolism of Water in Theophany

Water plays a central role in Theophany, symbolizing purity, life, and transformation. It's perceived not only as a physical substance but also as a spiritual one, carrying profound connotations within Orthodox Christianity. During Theophany, **water is blessed** and believed to take on holy properties, becoming a conduit for sanctification and an emblem of divine grace.

As I delve into the scriptures, it's clear that water carries a duality of destruction and regeneration. In the Old Testament, it is seen in the great flood that cleanses the world of sin, and in the New Testament, it appears as the waters of the Jordan River where Jesus was baptized. This baptismal water signifies a **new beginning**, washing away the old self and refreshing the spirit akin to the rebirth of Creation after the deluge.

The practice of blessing bodies of water during Theophany also holds symbolic weight. Orthodox Christians often gather at rivers, lakes, or seas, where the blessing is performed. This ritual signifies the sanctification of nature and is a reminder of the **participation of all creation** in the redeeming act of Christ's baptism.

Moreover, theophany water is used throughout the year for various sanctifying purposes, reinforcing its significance far beyond the feast day:

- Blessing homes
- Healing purposes
- During other sacraments and rituals

In baptism, the symbolism of water reaches its zenith. It represents a tomb and a womb simultaneously — a tomb for dying to sin and a womb for giving birth to new life in Christ. Orthodox faithful view their own baptism as a personal

participation in Jesus' baptism. They're reminded that through the waters, they're initiated into the faith, emerging as changed individuals ready to embark on their spiritual journey.

In the liturgy, the use of water serves as a material and mystical link between the physical and the divine. The blessing of the waters during Theophany is a vivid enactment of divine **incarnation and sanctification**, encapsulating the essence of God's closeness and the transformative power of His presence in the world.

The Sacred Rituals of Theophany

Theophany isn't just a day for reflection; it's marked by a rich tapestry of sacred rituals that engage the faithful in a profound spiritual journey. Among these, the **Great Blessing of the Waters** stands out as a pivotal moment. This ceremony is performed twice: once on the eve and then on the day of Theophany itself. During this ritual, I watch as priests recite prayers and then proceed to sprinkle holy water, a sign of divine presence, on the congregation, symbolizing the washing away of sins.

In many Orthodox communities, there's a tradition of throwing a cross into a body of water. The bravest among the faithful dive in — regardless of the chilling temperatures — to retrieve it. This act of retrieving the cross signifies Christ's baptism and serves as a public declaration of faith.

I'm also intrigued by **house blessings**, a practice where the sanctified waters from Theophany are used to bless and protect the homes of parishioners. A priest typically visits homes with a container of Theophany water, sprinkling each room while reciting prayers. This custom underlines the belief that God's grace permeates every aspect of our lives.

Great Blessing of the Waters

- Eve of Theophany and the day itself
- Sprinkling of holy water on the congregation

Retrieval of the Cross

- Symbolizes Christ's baptism
- Acts as a declaration of faith

House Blessings

- Theophany water blesses and protects homes
- Priest sprinkles water and recites prayers

These rituals aren't simple ceremonies; they're acts that bind the community together. They root Orthodox Christians in their faith, allowing them to participate physically in the mysteries of Theophany. Each droplet of water becomes a symbol of the Holy Spirit's renewing power — connecting the earthly with the heavenly.

Clearly, Theophany's rich liturgy and communal practices go beyond mere remembrance. They're about engaging with faith at the deepest levels, where holy water isn't just a symbol — it's a living, breathing testament to belief, renewal, and the enduring promise of sanctification.

Conclusion

The Feast of Theophany holds a profound place in Orthodox Christianity, not just as a historical commemoration but as a living, communal experience. Through the Great Blessing of the Waters and other cherished rituals, I'm reminded of the depth of our faith and the transformative power of God's presence. As the holy water touches our lives, we're renewed and united in the divine mystery. Theophany isn't simply an event to remember — it's an invitation to step into a renewed life, a moment where heaven touches earth and sanctifies our journey.