

## Sunday After Theophany

Today, on the Sunday after Theophany, we continue to celebrate the manifestation of the Trinity; for, when Christ was baptized by John in the river Jordan, the fullness of the Holy Trinity was made manifest, with the voice of the father declaring Christ his beloved son, and with the Holy Spirit in the form of dove descending upon him. Theophany and Nativity are intimately connected, for both feasts commemorate God's great revelation to the human race. With Christ's Nativity and Baptism, what before was cloaked in shadows and darkness comes to light. In today's Gospel we hear how Christ fulfilled the prophecy that "the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is spring up." Generations had awaited the coming of the Messiah and were illumined by the manifestation of the life-giving Trinity at Christ's Baptism. For each of us, who once sat in darkness, we have been illumined by the light of Christ; at our baptism we depart the region and shadow of death, as we are buried and resurrected with Christ in the water of baptism. Christ's birth and baptism inaugurate our new life, which we participate in by our own baptism. When Adam transgressed, death and sin entered the world; The whole created world became subject to death and decay; but in the hymns for Theophany we hear how the 'nature of water is sanctified.'; Christ, in coming to the world as one of us, and suffering, dying, and arising from the dead, frees us from the power of sin and death.

We see the entire world made new by Christ with the Great Blessing of the Waters that takes place at Theophany. Christ came into the world to sanctify the world. We bless the waters each year to continue partaking in this renewal that Christ gives to the world.

In today's Epistle from St. Paul, we hear of how Christ fills all things. He descended to the lowest depth: he descends into the waters of the Jordan, though he has no need of purification, being the only sinless one, just as he will later descend into the lowest pit of Hades to free all of those there held captive. He not only descends but he also ascends far above all the heavens, in order that he might, as St. Paul tells us, fill all things. Christ fills all things by becoming man, like unto us. The unseen and untouchable God takes on human form. And through Christ's taking on flesh and

undergoing baptism we are given access to Divine Grace. Christ's baptism leads to our own baptism, when we are baptized with Christ. We are given baptism and the other sacraments as physical manifestations of divine grace. The middle wall that stood between us and God is broken down through Christ's coming in the flesh.

And how do we respond to such marvelous events? St. Paul tells us in today's reading that we are given grace according to the "measure of Christ's gift for the edification of the Body of Christ" . . . "till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." We are called to work toward perfection. Perfection, the aim and goal of our life, is nothing other than coming to know God. Perfection (yes, a lofty goal, but one Christ gives us!) that is found in the progress towards perfection, as St. Gregory of Nyssa teaches us. To put it another way, salvation is a process; constant progress in virtue and godliness leads us toward perfection. We can't remain where we are. At our baptism we receive illumination, and this is our entry into a new life. But we must be continually making progress; the more we come to know God, the more we desire to know him; and that desire leads us to know him better, and so the journey continues. The Church gives us guides and helps us along the way; we have our daily prayers, we have our times of fasting, we have the commandments. We should remember that these are not ends in themselves—we don't fast just to say we kept the fast—but things such as fasting help us draw closer to God. We also have confession, in which we are reconciled and receive a 'second baptism' Most importantly, we have the very body and blood of Christ, offered for us, for the remission of sins and life everlasting.

With the birth and baptism of Christ, we behold the beginning of our salvation, when God the Word comes to restore fallen Adam. As we sang on both the Nativity and Theophany, "God is with us." At his baptism, we see the fullness of the life giving and Holy Trinity. Our own baptism brings us into the Church, where salvation is found. As St. Gregory of Nyssa teaches us, our life as Christians is a life of continually progress; our life in the Church is a journey, and the closer we come to God, the more we desire Him. Let us, in this season of Christ's Theophany, instill afresh in ourselves that desire to draw closer to God, by keeping the commandments, by purifying our souls and bodies by prayer and fasting; and let us partake of the heavenly bread, which has come down to

us for the life and salvation of the world. Christ has come to fill the whole world; but in order to do so, we must let him into our hearts.