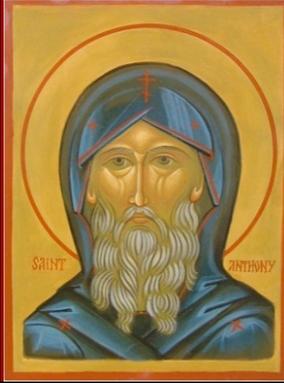


SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



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THIRTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 4 January 2015

tone 5—Forefeast of Theophany. Synaxis of the Seventy Apostles; Venerable Theoctistus, Abbot at Cucomo, in Sicily (800); Martyrs Zosimus and Athanasius, hermits in Cilicia (3rd-4th c.); Ven. Euthymius and his twelve companions Vatopedi (Mt. Athos—1285). Ven. Onuphrius of Chilandari (Mt. Athos), Martyr (1818).

TROPARIA

TROPARION OF THE RESURRECTION (Tone 5): Let us believers praise and worship the Word; coeternal with the Father and the Spirit, born of the Virgin for our salvation. For, He took pleasure in ascending the Cross in the flesh to suffer death; and to raise the dead by His glorious Resurrection.

FOREFEAST OF THEOPHANY: Make ready, O Zebulon, prepare, O Nephtali! River Jordan, cease thy flow and receive with joy the Master coming to be baptized! And thou, Adam, rejoice with the first mother, and hide not yourselves as ye did of old in Paradise; for seeing you naked, He appeared to clothe you with the first robe. Christ shall appear, desiring to renew the whole creation.

TROPARION OF SAINT ANTHONY THE GREAT (Tone 4, Russian): Like the zealous Elijah thou didst become, and followed John the Baptist in his upright ways. A dweller in the wilderness, thou didst steady the world by prayer. O Father Anthony, intercede with Christ our God for our souls' salvation.

KONTAKION OF EPIPHANY: Today hath the Lord appeared in the courses of the Jordan, crying to John and saying, Be not dismayed at my baptism; for I have verily come to save Adam the first to be created.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance! To Thee, have I cried, my God!

From Saint Paul's Epistle to Timothy

(2 Tim 4:5-8) Timothy, my son, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your 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, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

We read in this text selected for the Sunday before Theophany that a heavenly reward awaits those who all those who have loved God's appearing. "God's appearing"? This somewhat strange expression refers to God's incarnation, when He becomes one of us, truly human, truly sharing our experience; it also refers to Christ's public manifestation, at the moment when He begins his ministry—at his baptism in the Jordan River.

The Apostle Paul never saw the Lord being baptized and never once met Him while the Lord was traveling, teaching, healing, and making disciples. How, then, does he claim to have "loved His appearing"? Saint Paul did meet Jesus after the Crucifixion and Resurrection. His encounter with the risen Jesus Christ, in a blinding light that met him on the road to Damascus, turned his life around. And, indeed, Saul "loved God's appearing": from a persecutor of Christians, he became the most zealous apostle of Christ; from a scholar of Scripture, he became one who understood the Bible not only intellectually, but first and foremost by spiritual illumination.

Today's Apostle reading gives us hope. We, who live two thousand years after the events of the Nativity and Theophany, are no less able than the disciples to meet and love the Lord who has appeared for our salvation. In fact, the reason for our liturgical celebrations is precisely to shape our inner being, so as to make possible a genuine spiritual intimacy with God. Liturgy is not merely "remembering" events, no matter how important, that took place two thousand years ago. On the contrary: Liturgy makes both past and future present right here and now—because in Liturgy we enter into God's presence. This is why we sing "*Today* the Virgin gives birth" or "*Today* the Lord is baptized in the Jordan." Similarly, the reward (the "crown" of which the Apostles speak) is not only something we are looking forward to in the future, but something which starts here and now.

In Church, beginning with the services, and continuing with our individual lives, we are being trained for this marathon of a Christian life. May we also draw closer to Christ, receive and love His coming among us, so that we also be able to speak with the Apostle: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith!"

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

From the Gospel according to Saint Mark

(Mark 1:1-8): The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "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 the baptizer appeared 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 will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

Unlike the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the Evangelist Mark writes nothing about the infancy of Christ. His account starts very abruptly ("The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God") and then moves directly to the Jordan Baptism.

Surprising as it may be to us, it is a fact that the early Church simply did not attach much importance to the physical birth of the Lord; the Jordan Baptism, by contrast, was viewed as extremely important—and it remains, in the Christian East, the second most important feast of Christ (after Pascha).

The Baptism marks the beginning of Christ's public ministry. It is called "Theophany" ("manifestation of God") because it marks the transition from the ministry of prophets, who announce that God *will come*, and God's own apparition here and now: the One so long awaited has arrived!

The Jordan Baptism is called "Theophany" also because it reveals, first of all, the divinity of Jesus: He is the one greater than the last and greatest of the prophets; the Messiah in whom the fullness of the Holy Spirit abides, the one who will baptize the work with Spirit and fire. The Jordan Baptism is also a revelation of God as Trinity: the Son is baptized, the Spirit descends over the waters, the Father points out His Son.

Theophany marks the sanctification of the entire world. It is not Christ who receives something from being baptized! On the contrary, it is He that sanctifies the water and, through water, the entire world. This is why at the feast of Theophany we bless water and we continue the celebration with the blessing of homes and families. Celebrating the Feast of Theophany should be a priority for all of us, even though it takes some sacrifice of time and energy. Let us begin the new year 2015 under God's blessing, and open both our hearts and our homes to the presence of the Lord.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tomorrow, January 5, 6PM: Vespers Divine Liturgy for the feast of Theophany.

Next Sunday, 11 January, 1:30 pm: After Divine Liturgy, we will gather at Lake Arthur in Moraine State Park, joining the parishes of Sts Peter and Paul and St Andrew, as well as the nuns at Transfiguration Monastery.

- **Where?** Moraine State Park, South Shore of Lake Arthur, Bear Run boat launch. We will gather at the Bear Run Launch parking area (see directions below), then together make a procession to the fishing pier for the service.
- **Directions:** from Butler take Route 422 W to the South Shore exit of Moraine State Park and turn right. Turn left at the sign for Bear Run Launch (at the corner where you see the State Park office) and go up the hill. At the top of the hill turn left following the sign for Bear Run Launch and go down the hill to the parking area.

Sunday, 18 January: Feast of Anthony the Great, our patron saint. As we did in previous years, we will be hosting our brothers and sisters from the other two Orthodox parishes, donate the collection to the nuns of Transfiguration Monastery (since they are the followers of Saint Anthony, “the father of monasticism”), and learn something about how the life and teachings of Saint Anthony can help us today. Our speaker will be Dr. Timothy Becker, a student of the Fathers and an ardent seeker for the fullness of Truth, who received his doctoral degree after working with one of the very important Orthodox scholars today, Fr. John McGuckin.

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Rick and Seba (Michaels), Bill and Ann, George (Georgiades), Christine (Abraham), Jim, Tony, Samantha, Luke (relatives of Dollie's), Norma, Richard (Michaels), Victoria (Frank's mother), Richard (Johns), Bill, Ed, Peter, Georgia and Scot, Sam, Karen (Joanna's mother), Diane, Sula, Dollie, Dolores (Bingham), Karyn, Ignatius and Amy, John, Jonathan and Joanna, Andrei and Nyoka, Benjamin, John, Janet, Craig, Christy (relatives of Jean); Ron, catechumen; Shea and Katie (and newborn Judson), Timothy and Caroline – seeking for the true faith.

DEPARTED: Phyllis (Seba's sister), Angeliki, Metropolitan Philip; Joe and David Sipos; Bill (Georgia's father-in-law), Glenn (Jean's grandson); Stella, Edmund (Ed's uncle), Richard, Dolores Patricia (Thompson), Leatrice (Totin), Ed (Joanna's grandfather), Joseph (Rose's father), Fred (Dollie's uncle), Bob (Diane's father), Michael, Gabriel, Hilda (Chris Abraham's mother).