

Adult Catechism Class January 8, 2015

Part 1: Scripture Passages:

Matthew 3:13-17: Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, 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 it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Acts 2:37-42: Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Romans 6:3-6: Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.

Part 2: The Feast of Theophany and Importance of Blessing of Homes

This world, this creation, is in captivity; it is enemy held territory. The evil one, having enslaved all of creation at the fall, has laid claim to every nook and cranny of this earth. And for a while it looked as though he might be able to hold onto it. But then he reached too far and attempted to enslave the Master of All and to bind Life with the chains of death and his power was broken. But creation is still fallen, it is still contested land in the spiritual battle. We, as Christians, are engaged in this struggle to reclaim fallen nature for the Kingdom of God. We often talk about this in terms of our own salvation, but the Church, addressing all of creation in a wholistic manner, also reaches out and reclaims a bit here and a bit there of creation in general. We do this in order that we might restore the usefulness of creation for working out our own salvation. Hence we bless anything that might help us in our salvation - and by blessing it we reclaim it for the Kingdom of God. There are few things more vital to our lives than our homes. In our homes we pray, we work, we talk to others, we order our lives, we work out our marriages, etc. What more important place to reclaim for the Kingdom of God - or is it better to continue living in a place which is occupied by the enemy? For the most effective working out of our salvation, we must drive the enemy out of our homes, and keep him at bay by our prayers, our righteous life, and the annual sprinkling by Holy Water at Theophany.

Part 3: Some Facts about House Blessings after Theophany:

1. Houses are traditionally blessed with "Theophany water" each year. A house can be blessed at any time, but the usual season for yearly blessings is from Theophany until the beginning of the Lenten Triodion, which begins four Sundays before Great Lent begins. This is not a hard and fast rule, but a good rule of thumb.
2. Some people place great importance on "Theophany water". This is just water that has been blessed with the Great Blessing of the Waters service on Theophany. Another name for this water is simply "Holy Water". We can bless water any time of the year that there is a need for it. The water blessed in for instance, August is no more and no less "holy" than the water blessed on Theophany.
3. Water is blessed using the "Great Blessing of the Waters" service two distinct times during Theophany: after Vespers on the Eve of Theophany and after the Divine Liturgy on Theophany. The blessings are identical, and the water is identical.
4. In many places, it is traditional to bless water in lakes or rivers. Many people will take a dip in the water after it is blessed.
5. When a home is blessed, the priest brings everything needed for the blessing: •Holy water •A "krupilla" (brush for flinging the holy water), •Bowl for the water •Candles •Theophany icon. Many pious homes supply a bowl, candles and the family Theophany icon. The family should provide the priest with a list of all family members, living and deceased. The bowl and icon should be placed on a clean table with a cloth on it, preferably near the family icon corner. It is good for candles to be lit. The house should be clean, with all radios and televisions off. The priest will bless all rooms of the house except the bathrooms. In homes with children, it is always good for the little ones to carry a candle or a small cross and "lead" the priest throughout the house. An elder member of the house may also do this.
6. The basic order for a simple home blessing is as follows:
 - a. The bowl of water, icon and lit candles are placed on a clean table. IF there is a censer, it may be lit.
 - b. The priest begins the service with a blessing and the Trisagion prayers (O heavenly King through the "Our Father".) It is always preferable that the eldest of another member of the family say the Trisagion prayers.
 - c. After this the entire home is blessed, with the family walking with the priest holding candles and the Theophany icon while the Theophany Troparion is sung over and over!
 - d. Upon finishing blessing the house, the family gathers again at the table, and a short litany is said for the welfare of the family. The priest should have been provided a list of all family members, including those who are ill.
 - e. After this a short prayer, and the service is ended.
 - f. It is entirely appropriate the deceased loved ones of the family be commemorated from a list provided to the priest.

g. Sometimes the family wants to give the priest a little something to eat; depending on the time the priest has, he may stay and visit.

7. When a priest visits, it is NEVER required that the family gives him money. The scripture tells us "Freely you have received, freely give". It is a pious custom among some to give the priest a donation at this time, but this should never be thought of as a requirement. The priest comes to the home because he wants God's blessing to be upon it, and to know those in his flock better and to be available to them.

Part 4: Major Feast Days for January:

January 1: Circumcision of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ & Feast of our Holy Father Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia

Since the Mosaic Law commands that if a woman give birth to a male child, he should be circumcised in the foreskin of his flesh on the eighth day (Lev. 12:2-3), on this, the eighth day from His Nativity, our Saviour accepted the circumcision commanded by the Law. According to the command of the Angel, He received the Name which is above every name: JESUS, which means "Saviour" (Matt. 1:21; Luke 1:31 and 2:21).

TROPAR for Circumcision of Jesus (Tone 1): O Jesus, enthroned on high together with Your eternal Father and Divine Spirit; You condescended to be born on earth of a maiden and virgin mother. And on the eighth day You were circumcised. Glory to Your most noble decision; glory to Your plan of salvation; glory to Your condescension, O Lord; You alone love mankind.

Saint Basil the Great was born in the year 329 in Caesarea of Cappadocia, to a family renowned for their learning and holiness. Through the good influence of his sister Macrina, he chose to embrace the ascetical life, abandoning his worldly career. About the year 370, when the bishop of his country reposed, he was elected to succeed to his throne and was entrusted with the Church of Christ, which he tended for eight years, living in voluntary poverty and strict asceticism, having no other care than to defend holy Orthodoxy as a worthy successor of the Apostles. The truly great Basil, spent with extreme ascetical practices and continual labors, at the helm of the church, departed to the Lord on the 1st of January in 379, at the age of forty-nine. His writings are replete with wisdom and erudition, and with these gifts he set forth the doctrines concerning the mysteries both of the creation (see his Hexaemeron) and of the Holy Trinity (see On the Holy Spirit). Because of the majesty and keenness of his eloquence, he is honored as "the revealer of heavenly things" and "the Great."

Tropar of St. Basil the Great (Tone 1): Your voice resounds throughout the world which has accepted the lessons so well taught by you. You have given explanation of divine truths. You have clarified the nature of created things. You have made a rule of life. By your royal priesthood, O venerable Father Basil, intercede with Christ to save our souls.

January 6: The Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

About the beginning of our Lord's thirtieth year, John the Forerunner, who was some six months older than Our Saviour according to the flesh, and had lived in the wilderness since his childhood, received a command from God and came into the parts of the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance unto

the remission of sins. Then our Saviour also came from Galilee to the Jordan, and sought and received baptism though He was the Master and John was but a servant. Whereupon, there came to pass those marvellous deeds, great and beyond nature: the Heavens were opened, the Spirit descended in the form of a dove upon Him that was being baptized and the voice was heard from the Heavens hearing witness that this was the beloved Son of God, now baptized as a man (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:1-22). From these events the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ and the great mystery of the Trinity were demonstrated. It is also from this that the present feast is called "Theophany," that is, the divine manifestation, God's appearance among men. On this venerable day the sacred mystery of Christian baptism was inaugurated; henceforth also began the saving preaching of the Kingdom of the Heavens.

Tropar of Theophany Tone 1 At Your baptism in the Jordan, O Lord, worship of the Trinity was revealed; for the Father's voice bore witness to You, calling You His beloved Son, and the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the truth of these words. O Christ God, who appeared and enlightened the world, glory be to You!

January 30: Synaxis of The Three Hierarchs: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, & John Chrysostom: Gregory the Theologian was a Father and Teacher of the Church and was born in 329 in Arianus, a village of the second district of Cappadocia, not far from Nazianzus. After their studies at Athens, Gregory became Basil's fellow ascetic, living the monastic life together with him for a time in the hermitages of Pontus. His father ordained him presbyter of the Church of Nazianzus, and Saint Basil consecrated him Bishop of Sasima (or Zansima), which was in the archdiocese of Caesarea. Having governed the Church until 382, he delivered his farewell speech - the Syntacterion, in which he demonstrated the Divinity of the Son - before 150 bishops and the Emperor Theodosius the Great; in this speech he requested, and received from all, permission to retire from the see of Constantinople. He returned to Nazianzus, where he lived to the end of his life, and reposed in the Lord in 391, having lived some sixty-two years.

John Chrysostom, the greatest and most beloved of all Christian orators was born in Antioch in the year 344 or 347. From the years 374 to 381 he lived the monastic life in the hermitages that were near Antioch. His extreme asceticism undermined his health, compelling him to return to Antioch, where Saint Meletius ordained him deacon about the year 381. In 386 Bishop Flavian ordained John presbyter of the Church of Antioch. Upon his elevation to the priesthood his career as a public preacher began, and his exceptional oratorical gifts were made manifest through his many sermons and commentaries. Because of his fame, he was chosen to succeed Saint Nectarius as Patriarch of Constantinople. He was taken away by stealth, to avoid the opposition of the people, and consecrated Patriarch of Constantinople on February 28, 398, by Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria, who was to prove his mortal enemy. Saint John was banished to Pontus in 403. The people were in an uproar, and the following night an earthquake shook the city; this so frightened the Empress Eudoxia that she begged Arcadius to call Chrysostom back. In June of 404 he was exiled to Cucusus, on the borders of Cilicia and Armenia. He died on September 14, 407. His last words were "Glory be to God for all things."

TROPAR for the Three Hierarchs: (Tone 4): O teachers of the universe, equal to the apostles, pray to the Lord of all to grant peace to the world and abundant mercy to our souls.