

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church
971 St. Clair Rd, Johnstown, PA 15905
Rev. Presbyter Dragan Vukovic
(814) 244-4063

The Sunday after Theophany
(01.21.2024)

Matthew 4:12-17

Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephtholim: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephtholim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. **(KJV)**

Today God's Holy Church continues to celebrate the Baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Jordan. The celebration will continue throughout the week. Jesus' Baptism is of great importance.

Jesus' Baptism manifested the Holy Trinity. This manifestation is expressed clearly in the Troparion of the Feast. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are clearly mentioned in the Troparion.

Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan renewed Creation. John the Baptist experienced the greatest of honors when Baptizing Jesus. Each believer benefits when reflecting on the meaning of his or her baptism into Christ.

Believers are to live a life of purity and faithfulness to Jesus Christ following Baptism. The life of purity and faithfulness to Christ is to continue until the believer departs earthly life.

God's Heavenly Kingdom and eternal life are the ultimate goals for believers. God's Holy Church guides, instructs and nourishes believers for life's journey. The desire to nourish the soul's hunger keeps faithful believers united with Christ.

Jesus Christ preached repentance for believers. Repentance is an opportunity for believers to reject and move away from sin that has become part of earthly life. Repentance offers joy and forgiveness in Christ.

Jesus Christ washes away the sins of believers. Jesus establishes new life in believers. New beginnings occur when repentance takes place. Repentance is an opportunity to prepare for God's Kingdom and eternal life.

Fasting and prayer facilitate repentance. Honest self-evaluation reveals the sin affecting personal life. God's Church shows the way for repentance. Holy Confession and Communion provided newness and restored unity with Christ.

The lives of the saints and martyrs prove that extreme sinners can repent and be renewed in Christ. Extreme sinners can become saints if serious repentance occurs and the person becomes a complete follower of Christ.

The truth and proof of the life in Christ becomes known through living in Christ. Baptism is the first step. Repentance is necessary throughout life. Every person sins. Every sinner is welcome to repent.

Doubts will occur in believers. Believers will fall away from Christ. Sins will occur either intentionally or unintentionally. Hope for newness in Christ is always possible.

Depression and despair are conquerable with Christ. Hope leads to unity with Christ. The lives of saints and martyrs offer inspiration and intercession for believers. The Mother of God is a constant help for believers reaching out in faith.

Repentance begins with the believer taking the first step of acknowledging personal sin. The desire to get rid of the sin and begin anew in Christ must exist for repentance to take place.

Weak faith is strengthened by prayer, fasting and reading the Scriptures. Going to Church facilitates the atmosphere for repentance. God helps hesitant believers taking the steps to repent.

Jesus preached repentance. John the Baptist preached repentance. Wise believers engrain the value of repentance into their heart, mind and soul. The new life in Christ is always better than the old life in sin.

The Feast of Theophany offers a new way of looking at the world. Creation is perceived differently due to Jesus' Baptism. Each person's baptism is a life-changing experience.

The world is different when a person exists the Baptismal font. The person exiting the Baptismal font goes forth in Jesus Christ. The life in Christ is beyond the earthly into the eternal.

Believers take on the responsibility to live faithfully in Christ when saying "yes" to being baptized. Each person determines the degree of seriousness to be applied to live in and follow Christ.

The greater degree of seriousness applied to living in Christ, the greater the opportunities for growth in Christ. Christ is always present. Christ does not disappoint believers choosing to repent and follow Him.

This time of the year when Jesus' Baptism is being celebrated is a good time to heed Jesus' call for repentance. Sincere repentance is always timely. Repentance is necessary and beneficial before earthly death.

Every person will eventually face a final judgment before Christ. Continued repentance is the best preparation for the final judgment. Thank God for the present Gospel message of repentance.

Thank God for Jesus' willingness to forgive sinners. As we celebrate Jesus' Baptism, let us celebrate our own baptisms and rejoice in being Christ's followers.

Let us repent to ensure we are fully united with Christ and continue in joy.

The Sunday after Theophany. Holy Martyrs Julian and Vasilissa. Venerable George Ghozbit. St. Gregory of Ochrid. January 8/21, 2024. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania.

Father Rodney Torbic

The Great Blessing of Water and the Home

The Great Blessing of Water in our homes takes place after the Feast of Theophany, the Baptism of Christ, bringing the holy water & prayer in which Christ was baptized to our homes, as a blessing upon our families.

Traditionally, in most Orthodox parishes, the priest personally visits all his parishioners each year to pray with them in the place where they live, and to bless their surroundings with the newly sanctified water of Theophany (January 19).

We also bring the blessed water to our homes to use throughout the year to bless our homes and to drink whether we are ill or as part of our daily prayer life.

"There are many occasions in family life when a sip of holy water can help to remind us of the blessing that was given 'to bestow sanctification', 'unto healing of soul and body', 'to be a fountain welling forth unto life eternal', as the priest prayed in the litany of Epiphany day."

Weaving Christ into Our Lives

The blessing of homes by these holy waters maintains the spiritual association between the 'family church' and the parish, as well as again providing for the sharing of God's spiritual gifts. ... This annual blessing is not as elaborate as the blessing of the new dwelling, but because of this it should not be overlooked, for it is in this way that the grace of God is extended to individual dwellings.

When the children are present, they have the opportunity to see the parish priest in a different and personal situation. If the priest permits, they can lead the way through the house, or hold a candle. They can show him their rooms or pets or favorite toys. They receive a blessing with water. For children, the house blessing shows the connection of the Church to the home. This is a perfect time to introduce your small children to having their bedrooms blessed as a 'shield of armor' to protect them when they sleep and all the fears they may have as children do so often.

In Summary

What does it mean to ask God to bless something? All things in the world have been spoiled right along with us. God must bless His world again in order for it to be the way that He wants it to be. For this reason God sent His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit to the world: to bless everyone and everything that He made, to make all things good again. When the priest comes to bless our homes, he asks God to have mercy on the house, to rid it of every evil and to fill it with every blessing.

What a wonderful way to begin the New Year!

Schedule your Visit with Fr. Dragan Vukovic directly by calling your parish priest 814-244- 4063

God bless you all!

THE MASTER HATH COME TO SANCTIFY THE NATURE OF WATER

Homily on the Feast of the Theophany



In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!

“Today the Master hath come to sanctify the nature of water...” Thus the holy Church will now sing on the ninth ode of the canon. The present feast, as one of the stichera of the forefeast of Theophany says, is a most glorious feast, comparable to the previous feast of the Nativity of Christ: “Splendid hath the past feast been, and most glorious is the present day,” and further he indicates why: “The former was heralded by an Angel, and the latter was prepared by the Forerunner. Then blood was shed, and Bethlehem, having lost its children, wept, but now the waters are blessed and the baptismal font becomes fruitful. Then a star signaled to the Wise Men, now the Father reveals Thee to the world...”¹ If there a star indicated the manger, here the Father Himself indicates His Son: *This is My beloved Son* (Mt. 3:17).

Theophany is a feast of the revelation of the mysteries of God, and not only the mysteries of God, but also the mysteries of this world in which we live.

Man cannot be cut off from either the visible or invisible world, for he stands at the boundary of both, for he is created of the earth, from matter, from a visible and perishable creation, but within him is embedded a soul, an angelic spirit; as one of the Holy Fathers says, this is an angel in the

flesh. Man combines both worlds within himself, connecting with one through his visible body and ascending to the other through his invisible, immortal spirit.

We heard in the service for the forefeast of the [Nativity](#) that Christ is coming to take man, who has fallen to earth, back to Heaven.

Man is not cut off from visible nature. Today is revealed the mystery of Theophany, as well as the mystery of Christ's deliverance from sin, not only of man, but of the whole world. Christ appeared, as we sang in these pre-festal days, to clothe man in the first garment, in that garment in which the first man was adorned at his creation and of which the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete says: "I have torn my first garment which the Creator wove for me in the beginning, and therefore I am lying naked."² But this was not enough: "Christ has appeared to renew all creation."³

This inseparability of man from creature runs through the entire Divine service. Today we also prayed: "Have mercy on us and your world..." In the Christian understanding, we don't separate ourselves from the world in which we live, and Christ appeared at the Jordan not only to restore fallen human nature, but also to renew the whole of creation through the nature of water. "Being baptized in the Jordan, O our Savior, Thou didst sanctify the waters; being touched by the hand of Thy servant, Thou hast healed the passions of the world."⁴

But why is the world sanctified specifically through water?

Since the very first days of creation, water has been a spiritualizing, sanctifying nature.

Before the world existed as such, the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters, as over the purest matter.

The Lord created water in order to give it a sanctifying, purifying, revitalizing nature. By water, sin was drowned in the time of Noah; by water, the sacrifice offered by the righteous man was burnt. Water was seen to be purifying in the Old Testament. *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, says the Prophet Ezekiel, revealing the mystery of the spirit, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you* (Ezek. 36:25-26).

The nature of water is sanctified that it might, above all, sanctify man through itself. Each of us is sanctified by the Baptism in the Jordan at our spiritual birth, for the sanctification of the Jordan sanctifies water for the Sacrament of Baptism.

But that's not all. Not only is man purified by water at his spiritual birth, but through the same nature of water, all of nature is purified.

Man is the crown of creation, its highest point, and everything he puts his sinful seal on becomes infected with the same sin. Through man, the whole of nature is in sin. *For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now* (Rom. 8:22), says the Apostle Paul. Therefore, the Lord sanctified the nature of water that He might sanctify all of nature through it.

We completely forget how closely we're connected with the Heavenly world, with the angels and saints; we forget about this connection, without which our Church doesn't exist, without which we can neither celebrate the Divine services nor hope for eternal life.

We also feel no connection with the lower world. We believe that man and nature exist separately. At best, we recognize that nature is alive, that plants and animals are alive, since that's difficult to deny. But we have lost what we should have known: God created the world, He is Life, and everything created by Him lives by Him—or there is no God at all. God in creation appears first of all as Life, and this is revealed to us believers precisely today, as we stand here with St. John the Baptist, to whom we sang that he might rise with us and seal our singing, that he might again lift his gaze to the Holy Spirit and be spiritually united with us at this great Divine service: “Thy hand which touched the head of the Master, free of corruption, the same with which thou didst point Him to us by the pointing of the finger, raise thou it to Him for our sakes, O Forerunner. Thou hast attained great favor, since it was testified of thee by Him that thou art the greatest of all the Prophets. And thine eyes also, which did behold the All-Holy Spirit descending in the likeness of a dove, raise to Him, O Baptizer, granting mercy for us. Come, thou, and stand with us, concluding our praise and beginning the celebration of the feast.”⁵ Today is a feast not only for men who receive the garment of corruption at Baptism, but also a feast for the whole of nature, that nature “may be adorned in its first garment,” for it also lives and is infected by our sin. If each of us, having awareness, can and must repent, and in repenting, as the Holy Church believes, put on the garment of incorruption, then nature must also receive purification from the sin that we introduce into it; and this purification is given to it through the great feast of the Baptism of the Lord, when the whole of creation is renewed through the nature of water.

The holy Church addresses the mountains, and the hills, and the heavenly bodies, and the darkness, the frost, the angels, and the “multitude of people” alike, calling them to “sing and exalt the Lord.”⁶ But the highest stage in this creation is occupied by man, especially those who are glorified—the venerable and righteous and the humble of heart.

Today we celebrate the Great Blessing of Water, and we celebrate it not only as people who have gathered in this church to pray here and remember what once happened, to remember that the Lord once came to be baptized by John. The Church is once again revealing our connection with all of nature. We filthy sinners don't feel this connection between the seen and unseen worlds, between man and the elements, between man and the world—and that's why we're so lonely, that's why we don't understand the services that we celebrate.

Is it possible to say that there's a man and dead matter when we celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism with water? Through this water, through this material, birth is accomplished again—spiritual birth. This very ordinary water receives spiritual gifts of grace; it's sanctified, and through it we are sanctified. Another great Sacrament—Chrismation—is accomplished through chrim. Chrim is a simple, fragrant substance; but when it's sanctified, it acquires those properties that give us who have been chrismatedd the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Then bread and wine are consecrated and offered; they become the Body and Blood of the Lord, and they make us the Body of Christ when we partake of them, as says St. John Chrysostom.

Therefore, our connection with visible nature is so close because everything that lives, lives as a creation of God, lives by its Creator—the True Life.

We must remember on this feast of the consecration of the nature of water, that man stands on the borderline of two worlds: the invisible world, with which he is connected by his immortal soul, his spirit (this world elevates us to angels and bodiless spirits), and the visible world—through his body, which conducts the grace of the Holy Spirit to the soul and which becomes as immortal as the soul if we live in Christ. We—a microcosm—carry the union of two great worlds within us.

On this greatest of days, the Church believes that the Lord is baptized again and renews the nature of water with Himself; and through this, all of nature is renewed and receives its primordial garment again, which we also received in Baptism but then sullied by our falls. And then the Lord, by His mercy, through the Sacraments of Repentance and Communion again makes it incorruptible. Our greatest duty on this feast is to feel our connection with both worlds, with the world above and the world below.

This water, which lives and bears sanctification, true incorruption, cleansing us with *the washing of regeneration* (Tit. 3:5) in the Sacrament of Baptism, gives us spiritual birth, sanctifies both inanimate and animate creations: plants and animals—the whole of nature, which man, in his blindness, calls dead.

We must remember that we don't exist separately, that we're connected with this world as its crown, and that we must raise this world to the unseen world (St. Gregory the Theologian), we must raise it through the soul primarily through our body; we must purify the world that lies in evil and not pollute it again and again with our sin.

And on this day we're not alone—not only those gathered here, but the whole Church, visible and invisible, both men and angels, glorify the most honorable and magnificent name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages.

Amen.

New Martyr Priest Sergei Mechev
Translation by Jesse Dominick

Services this Week

- **Saturday (01.27.2024)**
 - **St Sava, First Archbishop of Serbia- *Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM***
- **The 34rd Sunday after Pentecost (01.28.2024)**
 - **Venerable Paul of Thebes; *Venerable Gabriel of Lesnovo - Divine Liturgy starts at 10:00 AM***

Donations January 14, 2024

Offering - \$ 4,675.00 Candles - \$76.00

Large Candles

IMO Mary Ellen Locher-Byrd from Helene Gleason
IMO Mike & Mildred Tumbas from Milica Knepp
IMO Grandparents Amelia & Pete Mastovich from Rick Kondas
IMO brother Joseph Kondas from Rick Kondas

Today, Sunday, January 21st following Divine Liturgy, we are all invited to our dear Father Dragan, Popadija and Petar’s home for the celebration of their Slava, Sveti Jovan! Please plan to join them in celebrating their special day.

Thank you to the following for donating to the purchase of the Gold Coin for the Cesnica: John Pavich, Carol & Tom McAllister, Jencine Campagna, Gary & Rose Marinkovich, Lazo Gjurich, Joseph Bartis, and Richard & Suzette Gardenhour

Feel free to take your poinsettia at anytime.

A special thank you to all who purchased Poinsettias

Tony & Linda Freidhoff & Joanne Uzelac IMO Donald Uzelac & Wayne & Patricia Freidhoff
Carole McAllister IMO Nick & Sara Davich and Nick Jr.
Evelyn Walet IMO Father Sam Vuckovich and Aunt Mimi
Eli Cvijanovich IMO Deceased members of the Cvijanovich/Bitsko Families
Dianna T. Dunnington IMO Milos & Mildred Tumbas
Karyn Waligora IMO Lazo & Bosa Vuckovich
Diane Tomak IMO Mother Bosa and Tetes Draga, Zora & Cookie, Baba Damjena and Kuma Julie
Danica B. Wess IMO Buncich Family & Wess Family
Mike Stipanovich IMO Alex & Beverly Stipanovich
Joe Bartis IMO Connie Bartis
Richard Kondas IMO Amelia & Joseph Kondas
John & Patricia Pavich IMO Deceased Family Members
Father Rodney Torbic
Laura, Pete, Pete Jr. & Michelle Nesdore

Donna Zimmerman IMO Nicholas, Mary, David, & Deborah Miller
Diane Thomas IMO Helen Sabo & Dorothy Lavrnja
Nicholas Banda IMO Deceased Members of the Devich, Perich & Banda Families
Michelle Pagano IMO Olga Pagano
Mary Kelly
Gary, Rose & Kristina Marinkovich IMO Family
Peter & Joanne Todorich IMO Nikola, Mildred & Nick Jr.
Richard & Suzette Gardenhour IMO Grisin, Bozich and Gardenhour Families
Helene Gleason IMO Betty & Lazo Vuckovich
Pat Niel IMO Buncich, Niel & Wess Families

UPCOMING EVENTS

St. Sava Celebration

Sunday, January 28th

Men's Club Pork Chop Dinner

Sunday, February 4th

FISH FRIES BEGIN

Friday, February 16th and
continue to Friday, March 29th.