2026-11-18: Theophany Feast

Introduction

Blessed Feast of the Theophany, my beloved. It’s a great blessing to be together today in celebrating this great feast with the Vespers and Praises and Lakkan and Divine Liturgy.

Of course, the Feast is called Theophany because it is during the baptism of Christ that God first revealed Himself to us as Trinity in a very clear way. The Father spoke from heaven and testified that the Lord Jesus Christ is His Son, and the Holy Spirit appeared in the likeness of a dove.

I want to talk today about baptism.

Baptism Anticipated in the Old Testament

St Gregory of Nyssa writes about this. He says it was not just the Incarnation and the Crucifixion and the Resurrection that are prefigured and anticipated by the Old Testament, but also the Sacrament of Baptism. Someone might think that Baptism is just a “side-effect” of God’s economy of salvation - the main part is the Incarnation and the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, and baptism came later. No! Baptism is pre-figured through the Scripture.

St Gregory of Nyssa gives several examples:

- Hagar’s well - when she left her master’s house and with Ishmael was going to die of thirst, the angel shows her a well with water that saves his life. Life-giving water.
- Abraham’s servant finds Rebekah at the well to marry Isaac - a marriage that was to produce the race of Christ had its beginning and its first covenant in water
- Isaac dug many wells in the deserts
- Jacob meets Rachel (the Church) at the well and uses the water to feed her and all her sheep
- Moses in the river in the basket to be saved from death by Pharaoh
- Passing through the Red Sea
- Passing through the Jordan with Joshua - the twelve stones are the twelve apostles (ministers of baptism)
- Water of Elijah on the sacrifice - he setup his sacrifice, soaked it in water three times, and then the fire of the Lord consumed it
- Elisha sends Naaman to bathe in the Jordan to heal his leprosy
- Prophecies:
  - Isaiah 1:16
  - Psalm 34:5
  - Ezekiel 36:25-27
  - Zechariah prophesies about Joshua taking off the old clothes and wearing new clothes

- Isaiah 35:1
- Psalm 143:6
- Psalm 42:2
- Psalm 29:3-4

”But here we must make an end of our testimonies from the Divine Scriptures, for the discourse would extend to an infinite length if one should seek to select every passage in detail, and set them forth in a single book.”

Baptism is Necessary for Salvation

- The Lord told us in both the affirmative AND the negative - Baptism is necessary for salvation.
  - “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3)
    “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5)
  - “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16)
- The Lord commanded the disciples to baptize and He said “make disciples of all the nations by baptizing them” - another word for disciples is Christians. Unless I am baptized, I am not a Christian. Baptism initiates me into God’s family!
  - “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)
- St Paul tells us that the Lord saved us according to His mercy through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit
  - “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:4-5)
- It’s also very clear from the Fathers of the Church
  - “If any man does not receive baptism, he does not have salvation.” – Cyril of Jerusalem [Catechetical Lectures 3:10]

The Water Changes

- St Gregory of Nyssa talks about how the sacramental action changes the water - same with the bread and wine, same with the oil, same with the priest who is a regular man but through sacramental action becomes a teacher and instructor of Mysteries. The same with the water. He says it’s called baptism of water and Spirit because the water cleanses our body and the Spirit cleanses our soul.
- St John Chrysostom when talking about Theophany Feast, he says “on this day, all obtain waters, carry it home, keep it all year (sometimes two or three years) and it does not spoil, but remains fresh. On this day, Christ was baptized and sanctified the nature of water”

- The Lord Jesus in His Baptism **Sanctified the Nature of Water**
  - It's not just regular water. The water itself changes and is sanctified. We even at the end of baptism have to pray a prayer of dismissing the water.
- What does the new water do? From Baptism prayers
  - "Strip them of their old condition, and renew their life"
  - "Fill them with the power of Your Holy Spirit unto oneness and union with Your only-begotten Son"
  - "Enlighten the eyes of their understanding with the light of knowledge."
  - "Let them be worthy of the washing of the new birth"
  - "Prepare them to be a temple of Your Holy Spirit"
  - "That they may be clothed with the vestment of salvation, and the armor of faith which is invincible and unconquerable to those who fight against us"
  - "May they be sheep in Your flock, and sons of Your heavenly bridal chamber, and heirs of Your incorruptible and eternal kingdom"
  - "Make them purified members of the Church, purified vessels, sons of the light, and heirs of Your Kingdom"
  - "That they may strive according to the commandments of Christ, and guard the seal unbroken, and keep the garment unspotted, and may attain the blessedness of Your elect"
- The water does all this… and yet it still LOOKS like Water. Its form hasn't changed.

Baptism Comes with Change

- St Gregory of Nyssa when he talks about baptism he said "many of you boast about being baptized, about being renewed… but SHOW ME after the sacramental grace, the change in your ways. SHOW ME the purity of your conversion."
- What we see after baptism, with our eyes, is the same person. He doesn't look different. He still has the same skin color, he has the same hair, same height, etc. Physically, he hasn't changed. So, he says, how do I know that you have changed?
- By the intentional motions of the soul - the soul separates itself from its old life. And this word separates is the word HOLY.
- I become HOLY. SEPARATED from my old life. SEPARATED from the world. To the point that my old self is not even recognizable.
  - Before, I was a liar. Now I am truthful.
  - Before, I was without order in my life. Now, I have structure and order and routine.
  - Before, I was envious of what others have. Now, I am content with my possessions - and not just content but impart from what I have to those who need it.
  - Before, I was a gossiper. Now I am affable. Now I am courteous.
  - Before, I used certain language. Now, my language is clean.
  - Before, I dressed in a certain way - certain clothes, certain hairstyle, piercings. Now I put those away. Now I dress as a prince, the son of a King.
- Like darkness - if a light is ignited, the darkness disappears. It's no longer recognizable. Like black paint. If you put a single drop of white in it, it's no longer black. No longer recognizable as black.
- This is what it means - take off the old man and put on the new and superior one

- We became children of God - children take on the characteristics of their father. So we look at our Heavenly Father's characteristics and we grow in His likeness.
  - "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, [45] that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:44-45)
- Baptism is not just a ritual. It's not just something we have to do. It is a change in my life.

So what now? I was baptized a long time ago - what do I do now?

- It's not too late.
- When we receive the holy water of Lakkan on this feast, we are participating in a Mystery. A Sacrament. It falls under the sacrament of Repentance and Confession. A renewal of our baptism.
- We can contemplate today on whether or not we have fulfilled the commandment we received on the day of our baptism.
- And let me turn in repentance and go sit with my Father of Confession

Baptism Commandment

Be diligent in learning the Holy Scriptures which are the breath of God
Be diligent in attending church services in the mornings and evenings
Be diligent in fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays, the Holy Forty Days fast, and all the fasts
Be diligent in keeping the Church laws and apostolic commands
Partake of the holy and divine Mysteries which are the Body and Blood of the Son of God that was shed for the salvation of the creation.
Grow spiritually according to a plan and sound order
Cultivate inside you beautiful qualities.
Plant within you righteousness and praise.
Pour inside you purity.
Plant within you obedience, love and holiness.
Plant within you compassion, charity, and justice.
Cultivate within you godliness, patience, and goodness.
Plant within you honesty and every good work that pleases God so
that your soul may live.
Learn the fear of God and His revered commandments
Guard yourself and do not go to unsuitable places, so that the Lord may guard you from satanic temptations
Avert from interacting with ungodly, the lecherous, the evil-doers and the wicked, and from participating in their entertainment, amusement, and mockery.
Do not neglect your catechism like the wicked and lazy servant who neglected his talent, but be diligent that you may hear His voice, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things." (Matthew 25)

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