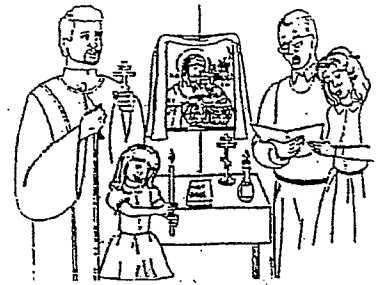


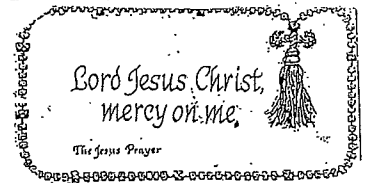


Fire & Light
St. Symeon Orthodox Church
 3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205
 Church Tel. 930-9681 / 907-9447
 Visit stsymeon.com
 ✘ **January 13, 2013** ✘
Sunday after Holy Theophany
 St. Hilary of Poitiers (369)



Martyrs Hermylus & Stratonicus at Belgrade (315), St. James of Nisibis (336),
 St. Maximus of Kapsokalyvia, Mt. Athos (1364), St. Irenarchus the Recluse of Rostov (1616),
 St. Eleazar of Anzersk Island (Solovki - 1656)

Christ is Born! Christ is Baptized!



⇒ **House Blessings** ~ Schedule with Father Alex ~

Dinner is not necessary. Getting your house blessed is.

⇒ **New Inquirer's Class** ~ Next Monday, January 14 - 6:30pm

* A full 10 to 12-week course in Orthodox Doctrine and Worship – Open to inquirers and to members who want to learn more about their Orthodox Faith.

Let us always be ready to make a new start

✘ "Should we fall, we should not despair and so estrange ourselves from the Lord's love. For if He so chooses, He can deal mercifully with our weakness. Only we should not cut ourselves off from Him or feel oppressed when constrained by His commandments, nor should we lose heart when we fall short of our goal...Let us always be ready to make a new start. If you fall, rise up. If you fall again, rise up again. Only do not abandon your Physician, lest you be condemned as worse than a suicide because of your despair. Wait on Him, and He will be merciful, either reforming you, or sending you trials, or through some other provision of which you are ignorant."
St. Peter of Damascus (5th C)

Another Year...

✘ "We see the water of a river flowing uninterruptedly and passing away, and all that floats on its surface, rubbish or beams of trees, all pass by. Christian! So does our life. . . I was an infant, and that time has gone. I was an adolescent, and that too has passed. I was a young man, and that too is far behind me. The strong and mature man that I was is no more. My hair turns white, I succumb to age, but that too passes; I approach the end and will go the way of all flesh. I was born in order to die. I die that I may live. Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom!"
St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (1775)

Walk free from hypocrisy...

✘ "If you would be simple-hearted like the Apostles, would not conceal your human shortcomings, would not pretend to be especially pious, if you would walk free from hypocrisy, then that is the path. While it is easy, not everyone can find it or understand it. This path is the shortest way to salvation and attracts the grace of God. Unpretentiousness, guilelessness, frankness of soul - this is what is pleasing to the Lord, Who is lowly of heart. Except ye become like children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of God (Matt. 18:13)."
St. Leonty of Optina (1841)

Pearls of the Holy Fathers (9.2)

The evil demons attentively and unflinching watch over us, see to what we are inclined, and arouse us to do this. Noticing our sinful desire, they darken our mind, and day after day steal our time. Like thieves they secretly penetrate into our thoughts and compel us to be concerned for corruptible things and to leave off God and one's own soul.

St. Paisius Velichkovsky

We have put the light burden on one side, that is to say, self-accusation, and we have loaded ourselves with a heavy one, that is to say, self-justification.

Abba John the Dwarf

When an archer desires to shoot his arrows successfully, he first takes great pains over his posture and aligns himself accurately with his mark. It should be the same for you who are about to shoot the head of the wicked devil. Let us be concerned first for the good order of sensations and then for the good posture of inner thoughts. **St. John Chrysostom**

Lord God, have mercy on me a sinner: I am not worthy to stand before Thee, seeing that I have never tried to embellish my soul for Thy presence. What that prostitute accomplished in a single day in beautifying herself surpasses everything I have ever achieved during all the years of my life. How can I have the face to look upon Thee, my God? I do not know what words to use in the attempt to justify myself in Thy presence, O Lord. What excuse have I before Thee, seeing that all my hidden secrets are laid open before Thee? No, alas for me the sinner who, as I enter the threshold of Thy sacred temple and appear before Thy glorious altar, have failed to offer the beauty in my soul that Thou wantest.

St. Nonnus (Life of St. Pelagia, the former harlot)

Even if we have thousands of acts of great virtue to our credit, our confidence in being heard must be based on God's mercy and His love for men. Even if we stand at the very summit of virtue, it is by mercy that we shall be saved. **St. John Chrysostom**

Monasticism itself is a perpetual labor of conquering passions and uprooting them in order that, being in a pure and immaculate state, one may preserve oneself before the face of God. This, then, is your task! Give your attention to it, and direct all your powers towards it.

St. Theophan the Recluse

If you are praised, be silent. If you are scolded, be silent. If you incur losses, be silent. If you receive profit, be silent. If you are satiated, be silent. If you are hungry, also be silent. And do not be afraid that there will be no fruit when all dies down; there will be! Not everything will die down. Energy will appear; and what energy!

St. Feofil, the Fool for Christ of Kiev

When anyone is disturbed or saddened under the pretext of a good and soul-profitable matter, and is angered against his neighbor, it is evident that this is not according to God: for everything that is of God is peaceful and useful and leads a man to humility and to judging himself.

St. Barsanuphius the Great of Gaza

On the Feast of Theophany ~ Christ's Baptism - Our Baptism

by Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos of Greece

From his book The Twelve Feasts of the Lord, pps. 112-116

Many are the names which have been given to the baptism of Christians and all of them point to its energy, to the work which it achieves. We shall look at some of these, the most characteristic.

Baptism is called birth because it gives the person re-birth. This term was given by Christ Himself in the conversation which He had with Nikodemos. Christ said: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (In. 3, 5). The Font is the spiritual womb which gives us rebirth into a new life. After Baptism we resemble Christ. And this birth is the one that characterizes us. Therefore the day of our baptism is our name day, according to St. Nicholas Kavalas.

The birth which occurs through holy Baptism is connected with purification and illumination. St. Gregory the Theologian says that Christ had no need for purification, since He is purification itself, but He was purified for us, that is to say, He entered the Jordan as also wearing flesh, while He was not carnal. Thus through His Baptism and Chrismation, Christ purifies and illuminates mankind. Purification from passions is preceded by doing the commandments and is followed by illumination by the energy of the Holy Spirit. St. Gregory the Theologian says characteristically: "Where there is purification there is illumination, for without the former the latter is not given".

According to St. John of Damascus forgiveness of sins is given alike to all who are baptized, but the Grace of the Holy Spirit is given in proportion to faith and previous purification. Through holy Baptism we receive the first appearance of the Holy Spirit, and rebirth is a beginning of a different life and a seal and protection and illumination.

The baptism of Christ in the River Jordan and our own baptism are an extraordinary flood, much higher and more beautiful than Noah's flood, as Patriarch Proklos of Constantinople says. Then the water put human nature to death, but now the water of baptism through the baptized Christ gives life to those dying of sin. Then Noah constructed an ark of undecayed wood, while now the intelligible Noah, Christ, has constructed the ark of the body from the incorrupt Mary. Then the dove which held an olive branch brought news of the fragrance of Christ the Lord, now the Holy Spirit, which came as a dove, pointed to the merciful Lord. All that happened at Christ's Baptism in the River Jordan is repeated in our life through the Sacrament of holy Baptism.

The Feast of the Theophany or Epiphany points to many great theological truths. As a personal approach to the Feast we should now add a few more things relating to our own baptism. Three indicative points should be particularly emphasized.

First. Those who are baptized and anointed are called Christians, both because they are disciples of Christ and because they have received the Chrism from the Holy Spirit. Neither takes away the other, since we are disciples of Christ through the Grace which we receive through the sacraments. As St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite says, all Christians can be called anointed of the Lord, "anointed with the perfecting chrism" meaning the grace and communion of the Holy Spirit. If the kings, priests and prophets in the Old Testament are called anointed of the Lord because they are anointed with the imperfect and ritual oil, much more so are those who have been anointed with the Holy Chrism. John the Evangelist writes:

"But the anointing which you have received from him abides in you" (1 In. 2,27). And the Apostle Paul affirms: "he who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit" (2 Cor. 1, 1-22). Anointing by the Holy Spirit, which is connected with the illumination and enlightenment of the nous, is the pledge of the Spirit, the seal of God.

Second. Through Baptism one receives the pledge of the Spirit, but with the possibility of fulfillment. St. Gregory Palamas says that just as the infant receives from his parents the possibility of becoming a man and of inheriting the paternal estate when he reaches the appropriate age, but loses it if he dies in the meantime, the same happens with the Christian. Through Baptism he receives the power to become a son of God and an inheritor of the eternal goods, if in the meantime he does not die of intelligible death, which is sin. Consequently, if then man loses his communion with God, if he dies spiritually, he loses the possibility which he received through Baptism. To be sure, grace is not lost, it does not abandon the heart of man, but it does not effect salvation.

Christ gave a commandment to His Disciples to 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" (Matt. 28, 19- 20). "Baptizing" and "teaching to observe" show the manner in which man is spiritually completed.

Third. When the Grace of Baptism is clouded by sin, then the baptism of repentance and tears must follow. The monastic tonsuring is called a second baptism, because it establishes the life of repentance and purification, through which man reaches his former glory. St. Gregory of Nyssa says characteristically: "Even one tear of repentance is equivalent to the water of baptism, and a painful groan brings back the grace which had departed for a while". Of course this tear must be shed in the atmosphere of repentance, as the Orthodox Church teaches and expresses it.

Christ was baptized in order to observe the law and to bring His Grace to the water, to the whole of creation and to man. So He gave to each one of us the possibility of attaining the Grace of adoption, of theophany in our personal life. This manifestation of God constitutes 'Theognosia' the knowledge of God, and since knowledge of God is an existential fact, it also brings salvation.

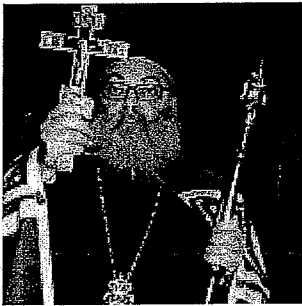
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HOMILY - On the Righteous Joseph

Then Joseph her husband, being a just man ... did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him
(Matt. 1:19, 24).

One must fear God more than men, and one must obey God more than men. This is the lesson from the life of the Righteous Joseph, the kinsman and guardian of the Holy Virgin Mary. He lived at the time of the juncture between the Law and Grace, and was faithful to the Law until Grace appeared; then, when the new Grace of God appeared, he became faithful to Grace. Obedient to the letter of the Law, he wanted to put the Holy Virgin away when she conceived the Savior of the world in her most pure body. But when an angel of God announced to him that Mary had conceived of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20), he abandoned his intention and did not put her away, but did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him. He did not reason for himself, but obeyed the will of God. Therefore, God made him worthy of great glory, both on earth and in Heaven. Quietly and secretly he served God, and God glorified him openly. Not only was he made worthy of the Kingdom of God but also his sons and daughters were. What father would want anything more than that his son would be an Apostle of Christ? And Joseph had two sons who were Apostles. Thus, God glorifies those who fear Him and obey Him.

Nativity Pastoral Letter of His Beatitude, Patriarch-Elect John X of Antioch



His Beatitude Patriarch-Elect John X of Antioch and All the East

December 20, 2012

With God's mercy,

John X, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and all the East

To my brethren, the Shepherds of the Holy Antiochian Church and my children who belong to this Apostolic See

We approach these Holy and Blessed Feasts as we witness the crucial events our Antiochian Church has gone through recently, first and foremost with the departure of our Father, Patriarch Ignatius IVth who ministered the Church with patience and faithfulness for several decades. His memory shall remain alive in our minds and hearts, and shall be eternal before the Lord Whom he served all his life. At this time, our Church and our people are experiencing dramatic situations caused by violence and troubles shaking our region.

The Holy Spirit has willed that I be elected by my brothers, the members of the Holy Synod, to succeed this great Minister, in spite of my unworthiness. However, I rely on God and on you, my brothers and children of my Church, and this shall make me expect, with great hope, divine help, which will enable us to overcome these hard tests and look for a better future.

In the midst of these events, you have left in my heart the feeling that you have lived in this period as the people of the living God; you have expressed this reality in three responses: You were deeply moved at the departure of our great Patriarch; You maintained your fasting, prayers and hope before the elections; and finally you showed joy, exultation and peace after the elections. For all these three responses and your care, allow me to express my deep thanks to you, convey my pride in you and my steadfast hope in the one body of our Church.

Behold, the Child Who is coming to us in the cave to die for us; is reminding us that He is with us, talking to us, and entrusting us with conveying the message of peace and love, which He addressed to each and every one of us and to the whole world. He is coming to us as a humble one, knocking at the door of our heart with gentility as if He wanted to be born in it. The feast of Nativity is not a mere remembrance of Jesus' birth in a cradle from the Virgin Mother of God; it was meant to be the feast of His birth in us, a birth that can only occur if we seek the purity that distinguished the Virgin Mary. The Birth of Jesus in us will invite us to renew our commitment to His teachings, and our struggle to become His unblemished Church, a Church that is free of weaknesses, pure in everything, and shining with the Holy Spirit. Together we shall be aware that the Church of Christ is our mother, and that the shepherds and the believers are called to be Christ's messengers inviting their brethren in the world to reconciliation and to the rejection of violence so that His peace may prevail.

The world will not be convinced unless it feels that it is much loved by the followers of Jesus and that they are its servants.

The Church is our mother. Each and every one of you is important and has a unique position in it. You have the right to be ministered by its shepherds. All ministers, at all ranks, should go out to you, listen to you, to your problems, and should seek to help you and answer all your crucial questions.

You have the right, as believers who submitted themselves to the Word of God and sought to be like Him in everything, that you be included in consultations and the resolution of its issues; all the children together with the father, are supposed to keep vigilance for the future under God of the family.

We approach this feast as many of the children of our Church are displaced, away from their homes, enduring much suffering. Our duty as brothers and sisters is to support them and give them consolation, not only with money and necessary material help, but also by showing them care, love and compassion.

We approach the feast as our people are facing many changes and challenges in a world that is departing increasingly from traditional concepts, making violence, consumption and possession a new law for this life. Needless to say, the luxury with which we celebrate this feast, the feast of the poverty of Bethlehem, is a clear sign that we, also, have adopted this law in the conduct of our lives. As we are accustomed to exchange gifts in the manner of the kings who visited the Lord Jesus at His birth, let us express our love to the Divine Child, coming to us, by feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, offering a shelter to the homeless and doing whatever we can do.

We approach this feast as many in our countries are asking what might happen to them. Brethren, the Child of the cave is saying to us: "Do not fear, I am with you. Do not fear because your brothers and sisters are called to help one another and support one another. Do not fear because you are the people of this region, in which God willed you to be born since ancient times. Do not fear, because you have in it many brethren who believe in love and peaceful co-existence.

Do not fear, lest you lose your dynamism; instead go to meet all with love, joy and full trust in your God, who is the God of love, Who is love itself. Be the heralds of reconciliation, and of a dialogue in depth."

We celebrate this feast with our other Christian brethren. We pray to God that he may give us to deepen our dialogue with them all, in order to reach the unity God desires, the unity without which the world will not believe that Jesus was sent by God.

Let us also celebrate with our Muslim brethren who look highly at Jesus Christ and confess his birth from the Virgin Mary according to the will of God. This feast is in common with them if we know how to make with them a dialogue of life and co-existence on the notions that bring us together in our religion and in our world.

Brothers and Sisters, bow down before the Child of the cradle who willed to dwell in you. I cannot but think here of our children who are awaiting us all over the world, our children in the Arab Gulf, Europe, Australia and the Americas. You are in my heart since I met you during my journeys and during my ministry of your churches. You are a real expression of the apostolic spirit of Antioch in the countries in which you are living. Your love for Antioch and the faith you are living makes me feel, more than ever, the necessity of working together in the service of the Church and of offering a living witness to our unity and love.

Thus we become true witnesses to the Lord in the world, and thus our Antiochian Church becomes faithful to its history which shines with the light of the martyrs and the saints. We have no other way but holiness, which makes everything possible.

I send to you the apostolic blessing assuring you that I carry each and every one of you in my heart, asking God to make me His faithful servant in you and to enable us to work together so that God may be glorified in the humanity he loved and in the Church which carries His name in this world.

This and That

No set of laws can eliminate evil from the world, or prevent every senseless act of violence in our society." So said President Obama in words of comfort in Newtown, CT. The President was right to speak of evil, but mistaken when he called the massacre "senseless." For this was a premeditated and purposeful act of mass murder, and the devil that did it knew exactly what he was doing and why...

Since the news first came in Friday from Newtown, we have argued about guns in America and mental illness, but heard little about the moral sickness of our society.

Are the folks who think America would be a better place with a more restrictive Second Amendment willing to restrict the First Amendment to stop all distribution of movies and cable shows that depict famous actors blasting enemies with assault weapons?

Not long ago, there existed in our hearts "a fear of God." How, we would ask ourselves, if we commit an evil act like murder, will we answer at God's judgment seat? For He will decide if we enter what the president called in Newtown, God's "eternal house in heaven." Patrick Buchanan

Did the National Club Association Cause Abel's Death?

"The first recorded act of violence was when Cain slew his brother Abel out in the field. The villain was not the club he used. Neither was it the NCA, the National Club Association. The true killer was Cain, and the reason for the murder could only be found in Cain's heart."

—Statement of Darrell Clark, father of Rachel Clark, before the House Judiciary Committee. (Rachel Clark was one of the victims of the Columbine High School shootings twelve years ago).

...Finding somebody else odd is itself a form of mental illness. In an unmoored age, what's not odd? Once upon a time, TV viewers from distant states descending on a Connecticut town to attend multiple funerals of children they don't know might have struck some of us as, at best, unseemly and, at worst, deeply creepy – a Feast of the Holy Innocents, so to speak. Mark Steyn

Preference for Ignorance

In 1850 those deficient in schooling knew their deficiencies, and wanted to learn. Today there is an actual preference for ignorance, which is regarded as authentic or democratic and morally superior to knowing anything, which would be elitist. ~ Fred Reed

The death of good language...

Why are things that once were the common property of the cultivated now regarded as fossils predating the trilobites? One reason I think is the weakening of the barriers of class. The educated cannot maintain standards of excellence when constantly bathed by television in mangled grammar and illiterate usage. Then there is a variant of Gresham's Law that says bad culture drives out good. In a sentence, the vulgar have discovered that it is easier to reject higher standards than to meet them. By sheer numbers they prevail.

The death of good language is part of the larger death of all culture, springing from the same causes: the domination of society by the mob. Note the decline in the sales of books, particularly books of history, the sciences, and literature: the rapid growth in genuine illiteracy, the disappearance of symphony orchestras. We have no poets, a nation of over three hundred million being far inferior to tiny, muddy London in the Seventeenth Century. Classical music is seldom played and never written. ~ Fred Reed

Looking at the West over the last century, the arc of history bends toward socialism and insolvency.

"The great obstacle to progress is not ignorance but the illusion of knowledge."

~ Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Daniel Boorstin

On Temptations (No, not the singing group...)

✘ "Brother, expect everyday that some temptation will come upon you --- be it death, or affliction, or great dangers. Endure these temptations eagerly and without becoming perturbed, reflecting that 'we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of Heaven' [cf. Acts 14:22].

Abba Isaiah

✘ "When temptation comes upon you, do not seek to discover why, how, or from whom it came; but how you might endure it without feeling sorrow or resentment.

Abba Mark

✘ "An evil deed committed by someone else does not add to our sins, unless we embrace it with evil thoughts (thereby filling our souls with the stench of other people's wickedness."

Abba Mark

✘ "Abba Anthony said: 'No one can enter the Kingdom of Heaven unless he has undergone temptations.'"

✘ "One of the Fathers said that unless a tree is shaken by the wind, it neither grows nor puts down roots; so also a monk [and ANY person seeking to be saved], unless he is subjected to temptations and endures them patiently, does not become courageous.

✘ "An Elder said: 'Take away temptations, and no one will become a Saint. Indeed, he who flees from a beneficial temptation is fleeing from eternal life.'"

✘ "An Elder said: If we were to cultivate humility, we would not need chastisement; for all of our woes happen to us on account of our arrogance. If a messenger of Satan was given to the Apostle to afflict him, lest he become puffed up [II Corinthians 12:7], how much more will Satan himself be allowed to trample on us, the arrogant ones, until we learn humility.'"

✘ "We ought always to have confidence in the Lord, that He will not allow us to be tried beyond our capacity [cf. I Corinthians 10:13]. But since He Himself taught us to pray that we not enter into temptation - 'Watch and pray, that ye not enter into temptation' [Matthew 26:41] - we must not throw ourselves into temptations (this is a violation of God's commandment, for it means handing ourselves over to death), but must safeguard ourselves. If, however, we dwell in a peaceful place, and we suddenly hear that there is going to be an onslaught of brigands, we should not be perturbed, since we are under the protection of God; for in that case, God sees that we have not willfully thrown ourselves into temptations."

St. Barsanouphios the Great of Gaza

Temptations occur by God's permission, for our benefit, so that our faith might be tested. And insofar as these things happen by God's dispensation, our faith and hope in God are confirmed by the teaching of the Apostle: 'God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will - with the temptation - also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it' [I Corinthians 10:13]."

St. Barsanouphios

"Remember God at all times, and He too will remember you when you fall into evils.

"Seek allies before waging war, and summon a doctor before you become ill. Pray to God before afflictions visit you; and while you are undergoing them, you will find Him to be an invincible helper."

Abba Isaac