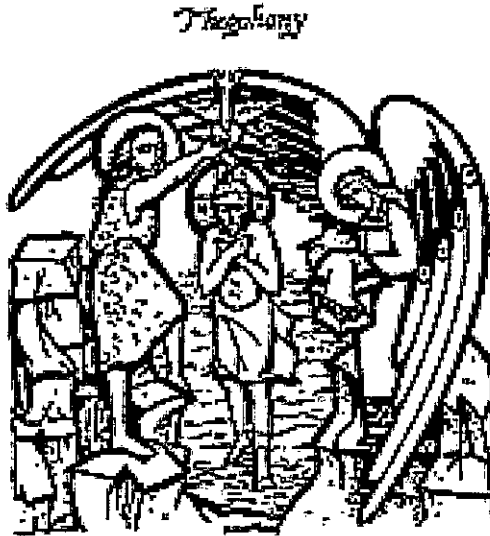


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**Saint Nicholas Orthodox Church Bulletin
And Holy Transfiguration Chapel**
A Parish of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA
Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople
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We would like to welcome all of our visitors and friends to Saint Nicholas Orthodox Parish. We would like to ask all of our new visitors to please sign our register so that we might be able to keep in contact with you about Parish celebrations and events. Through the intercession of Saint Nicholas we hope and pray that our community might continue to grow in numbers and in service to the Lord. Through your prayers and dedication of time, talents and donations, this can become a reality in all faith and in love.

In case of an emergency, please call Father Stephen day or night at the above telephone number.

January 21, 2024
Volume 17: Number 03
Celebrating our 17th Year of Serving the Lord
Schedule of Services and Activities

Sunday, January 21 – Sunday after Theophany – Tone 8 – Blessing of Water
9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy for the Faithful – Father Stephen

Sunday, January 28 – 34th Sunday after Pentecost – Tone 1
9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy for the Faithful – Father Gus

Sunday, February 4 – 35th Sunday after Pentecost – Tone 2
9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy for the Faithful – Father Gus

Sunday, February 11 – 36th Sunday after Pentecost – Tone 3
9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy for the Faithful – Father Gus

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

Sunday after Theophany – Matins: John 21:15-25; Liturgy: Ephesians 4:7-13; Matthew 4:12-17

Monday – Hebrews 8:7-13; Mark 8:11-21

Tuesday – Hebrews 9:8-10, 15-23; Mark 8:22-26

Wednesday – Hebrews 10:1-18; Mark 8:30-34

Thursday – Hebrews 10:35-11:7; Mark 9:10-16

Friday – Hebrews 11:8,11-16; Mark 9:33-41

Saturday – Leave-taking of Theophany - Ephesians 5:1-8; Luke 14:1-11

34th Sunday after Pentecost – Matins Matthew 28:16-20; Liturgy: Colossians 3:12-16;
Luke 18:18-27

The Blessing of the Water

The ceremonies of the great water blessing took hundreds of years to develop. We do not know the form of the original rite of the Jordan water blessing. Jacob of Edessa bore witness that the prayer “Great are You, O Lord...” came from Saint Proclus, Patriarch of Constantinople (434-446); the stykhyra “The voice of the Lord cries over the waters” and the prayer “O Trinity transcendent in essence...” from Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (+c.641). Of the Great Water-blessing the Barbarini Euchologion from the 8th -9th century has only the great Litany which is different from our present day one, and three prayers. The Typicon of the great Church of the 9th to 10th century notes that, toward the end of the Liturgy, the Cantor, sings the tropar “the voice of the Lord” and while it is being sung, all go to the baptistry in the narthex (or vestibule) of the Church. Here the Deacon sings the ektenia and the patriarch reads the prayer for the sanctification of the water and blesses

the water; 3 readings follow, and with the singing of the tropar the rite of water blessing is concluded. From the 13th century, the rite of Water Blessing became somewhat like our own, and in the 14th-16th centuries the rite of water-blessing reached its present form. (**A Byz. Rite**, Pg. 338)

Around 1148 the Ipatian Chronicle mentions the Jordan Water blessing in Ukraine and calls it “Vodokhryshi” or “water-baptism”. Originally it took place in our Church only on the vigil of the feast of the Theophany. Only after our Church began using the Jerusalem Typicon instead of the Studite Typicon, did she adopt the two water blessings. Maxim the Greek (+1556) defends the new custom according to which water blessing took place on the day of the feast itself at the river or spring. The liturgicon of Metropolitan Cyprian (+1406) already had the present rite of Jordan water blessing. (**A Byz. Rite**, Pg. 338)

In time, they've developed in our Ukrainian church certain rights connected with the great water blessing which the Greeks or other Slavonic Typicons do not have. The Greek typicon speaks only of a threefold cruciform submersion of the cross in the water at the end of the water blessing. The Russian tradition of the great water blessing has, besides this, a threefold blessing of the water with the hand. The Ukrainian Euchologion of Metropolitan Peter Mohyla of the year 1646, prescribes that after the first prayer the water be blessed three times cruciformly by making the sign of the cross in the water with a burning candle; after the second prayer – that it be breathed upon three times cruciformly...and after the third prayer – that it be blessed that it be blessed with the hand submerged in the water. The service of the Jordan blessing of water ends with the threefold cruciform blessing of the water with the cross by submerging it into the water, while the Tropar, O Lord, when You were baptized in the Jordan...” After the water blessing, the priest sprinkles the people with the holy water. Our people had a beautiful custom of erecting a cross of ice at the river where the water blessing took place. (**A Byz.**

Rite, Pg. 338-339)



The Icon of the Baptism of Our Lord

The composition of the icon for the Theophany developed between the 3rd and 6th centuries and has remained remarkably consistent over the centuries. In the 16th century the background consists of mountainous rocky peaks. The dark central area representing the waters of the Jordan look very much like the mouth of a cave, and it's reminiscent of a similar feature in the Nativity and Resurrection icons; Christ is portrayed standing naked in the Jordan, in a way that recalls some of the hymns; “O compassionate Savior, putting on the nakedness of Adam as a garment of glory, you make ready to stand naked in the flesh in

the river Jordan." Christ's right hand is raised to bless the waters; On the left Saint John the Baptist places his right hand on the head of Christ and with his left points to the one he is baptizing. On the right three angels attend on this mystery, showing the participation of the heavenly host at the baptism of him who is both God and man; their hands are covered in the traditional manner of veneration; the clothes they are holding are sometimes interpreted as the Lord's garments. At the top of the icon we see the dark blue segment of a circle representing the divine realm, and from that segment comes a dark ray; In a small circle between the divine realm and the head of Christ the dove is represented, and beneath this figure the dark ray divides into three; The Trinitarian nature of the Theophany is made clear in the icon. The whole scene is very concisely expressed in one of the hymns for the feast: "A strange wonder it was to see the Maker of heaven and earth stand naked in the river, and as the servant received baptism from a servant for our salvation. The choirs of angels were filled with amazement, fear and joy. Joining with them, we worship you: O Lord, save us. (**Festival Icons**, Pgs. 54-55)

In some Icons the scene is embellished with further details. Sometimes we see the gates of heaven shone open against the background of the divine realm at the top of the icon. Some icons incorporate additional small scenes of the Baptist preaching and baptizing, and in some cases putting an axe to the root of a tree (Matthew 3:10; Luke 3:9); There may be a larger number of angels. Fishes are sometimes shown in the water around Christ, and also Dragons, in accordance with the imagery in the hymns derived from Psalm 74: 13 "You did divide the sea by your might; You broke the heads of the Dragons on the waters." Frequently we see a male and a female figure in the water- personifications of the Jordan and the sea. The place of these figures in the icon is linked to Old Testament events which were seen to prefigure the baptism, namely the turning back of the Jordan by Elisha to create a path across the river, and the crossing of the Red Sea in the account of the exodus from Egypt; Both events being brought together in Psalm 114: 3. These images help to interpret Christ's baptism as opening a path to new life, and the placing of the figure of Christ against the waters that evoke the symbolism of both death and life reminds us that the path to new life is through his death. The story of the flood Genesis 6-9 is one of the Old Testament events which came to be seen as prefiguring baptism; It involved destruction and a new beginning, God's judgment and mercy, and was used by early Christian teachers in their exposition of the significance of baptism (1 Peter 3: 18-22). In the icon, as in the scriptures, the waters of the Jordan and the presence of the dove as the symbol of the spirit recalled the story of the flood and its significance for Christian theology. In the icon the strong vertical line formed by the body of Christ and the ray descending from the heavenly realm create a powerful axial symmetry around which the other figures are grouped. This vertical axis is to the left of the center of the icon; St. John is placed to the left of Christ at a higher position in the icon, thereby emphasizing the humility of Christ who comes as the servant of God to be baptized by a servant; The broader right section of the icon is occupied by the three angels. The outer curved edge of

the Baptist figure, the disposition of the angels bowing before Christ, and the bottom edge of the waters seemed to be contained within a circle; It is as if there is an unseen mandorla within which all the figures in the icon are contained. This use of form within the icon reinforces the truth that this event is being celebrated as the Theophany- the manifestation of God through the incarnate Son whose love takes him to the waters of baptism, not out of need for forgiveness, but in order to provide a way for the children of Adam to find their way to become children of God through the waters of the new rite of Christian baptism which Christ institutes. (**Festival Icons**, Pgs. 55 - 56)

The icon of the baptism of Christ is reminiscent of four other festival icons, and some reflections on these links is worthwhile. As already suggested, the way in which the Jordan river is depicted brings to mind The Cave in the Christmas icon and in the raising of Lazarus, and the underworld in the anastasis icon. God the sun descends to earth, descends into the waters of the Jordan, calls Lazarus from the grave, and descends to Hades. In icons of the theophany and the ascension the gates of heaven may be shown wide open; Heaven, open at the baptism for the Spirit to descend, is again open at the Ascension for Christ to enter in, bearing our humanity. As Christ's descent into the Jordan carried our sinful humanity through the waters of cleansing and redemption, and His Ascension carried humanity up to the throne of God, so in a similar way the church is called to be present in this world amid the life of the old Adam, while at the same time rejoicing that it is already united to the new Adam and the glory of heaven. (**Festival Icons**, Pgs. 56 - 57)

Sunday After Theophany

St. John as Forerunner: St. Matthew 4:12-17, especially vs. 12: "Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee." The Church identifies John, the son of Zacharias and Elizabeth, with a variety of names: "Forerunner, Prophet, Baptist, and Servant." The title "Forerunner" is particularly intriguing since Holy Scripture does not apply that specific term to St. John. Of course, when we speak of St. John's as the Forerunner, it is because in the first century, he helped to "prepare" men and women for the Lord's ministry, and he still does so.

In that time, two thousand years ago, St. John's preaching and baptizing signaled that the time had come for the Lord to leave His private life in Nazareth and assume a public ministry (Mt. 3:13). In a similar way the death of the Prophet was a sign for the Lord Jesus to go into Galilee and begin preaching, discipling, and healing (Mt. 4:12-17). The title, "Forerunner," is fortuitous several ways. The Baptist's prophecies forecast that the Lord's ministry would illumine men with the Holy Spirit. St. John's message and work foreshadowed Christ's emphasis on repentance, and the Prophet's death forebode the execution of the Savior.

In today's reading, the Evangelist Matthew indicates that the Lord Jesus, being filled with the Spirit (Mt. 3:16), caused "Light" to dawn for "those who sat in the region and shadow of death" (Mt. 4:16). The Spirit enabled the Lord's preaching to illumine the hearts of His hearers. By the power of God the Holy Spirit, the parables, the healing acts, and the teaching of the Incarnate Word of God were effective in the hearts of those who heard Him. The Lord Jesus declared the presence of the Kingdom, and the Holy Spirit caused Divine "Light" to shine within them, freeing them from the kingdom of sin and death, bringing them to the Kingdom of Light.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A VERY HAPPY BIRTHDAY - is expressed to Arnold Cookson, 1/29. May God grant him a very happy birthday and keep him for many, happy & blessed years!

OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHIES – are expressed to Father Gus and Pani Dobrodyka Georgia and family of the newly departed Servant of God, +Myrophora (Mildred) Christo. Please remember her soul in your prayers asking God to place the newly departed Servant of God +Marina in the abode of the Saints, where there is no pain, sorrow nor mourning. But only life everlasting. May her memory be eternal. Also please pray for the family that God may give them His strength in this, their hour of need.

REDNER FULL SALE SLIPS – are still being collected. Please save the whole slip.

READER MINISTRY: **January 21** - Subdeacon Kevin Minnich, **January 28** - Kris Scholl; **February 4** - Christina Mentis, **February 11** – Margaret Perkins

PLEASE REMEMBER TO PRAY FOR THOSE WHO ARE ILL – Metropolitan Antony, Father Geroge Bazylevsky, Father Paul Bigelow, Father Constantine Christo, Father Vasyl Dovhan, Father Oleh Hucul, Father Mark Leisure, Father John Nakonachny, Father James Norton, Father Paul Pappas, Father John Perich, Father Volodymyr Wronskyj, Pani Matka Lilly Lemar, Matushka Laura Odell, Matushka Lisa Weremedic, Jamison, Mikey Arntz, Wakako Alexander, Theresa Barnes, Paul Calistor, Joe Chas, Rita Cook, Dmitra Cookson, Davis William Doty; Steve Forte, Thomas Holt, Dot Howell, Norma Husnick, Walter Katolic, Judith Kocinski, Kristina Koutsoudes, Olympia Koutsoudes, Gina Louk, Frederick McCarthy, Bruce McGloan, Patricia McGloan, Stephen McNulty, Chritina Mentis, Connie Mentis, John Moniodes, Olga Moniodes, Margaret Perkins, Barbara Perrigina, Natassia Perrine, Robert Perrine, Michael Previte, Sandra Ramondi,Carolynn Ritter; Jim Saturno, Clay Seman, Gail Sherman, Lorraine Sherman, Gerald Sovinski, Diane Staples, Nicholas Taylor, Kathy Theodorakos, Merryl Trader, Ralph Vurgich, Cheryl Zabowski, Edward Zabowski, Markos Zerefos.

THE SACRED WATER OF THE JORDAN RIVER

The Baptism of our Lord is closely identified with the Jordan River, a body of water that had great significance for the Israelites long before this mysterious event. After wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, this was the river God's chosen people crossed to enter the "**promised land.**" It was from the banks of the Jordan that the Prophet Elias was taken up into heaven by a chariot of fire. It was also in these waters that Elisha – the successor of Elias – commanded that Naaman the Syrian wash and be cleansed of leprosy. The Second Book of Kings chronicles how Naaman was skeptical of this, claiming that the rivers of Damascus could be used to cleanse him just as well. Nevertheless, he did as Elisha instructed him to do and he was healed.

This was the river to which Christ came to be baptized. It was already "**sacred water**" for the Israelites, and our Lord's baptism in the Jordan served to reinforce Christ's claim to be the Messiah. There is no doubt that its relevance was not lost on the pious Jews of His time. Nor should its importance be lost on us either.

We cannot cross over into the "**promised land**" of God's heavenly kingdom unless Christ leads us there, just as Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan. Only Christ can wash and cleanse us of our spiritual illnesses. He is our only source of spiritual healing – just as Naaman had only one source of assistance for his physical ailments.

As we celebrate the great Feast Day of Theophany, may we remember how the Jordan River was sanctified forever by Christ's baptism in its waters.