

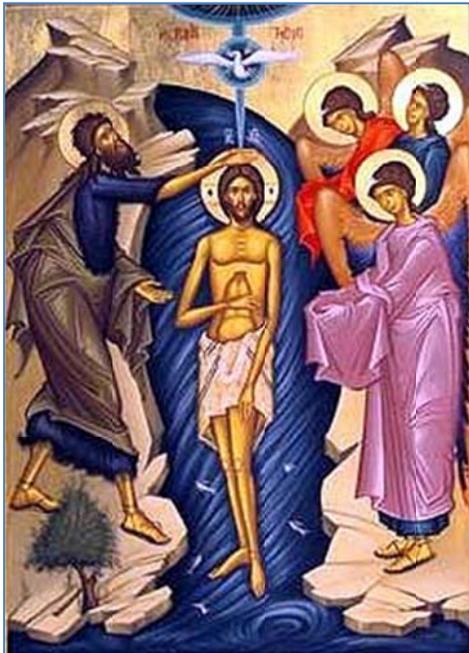
Is It Six or Is It One-Half Dozen? Hmmm....

Thursday, January

Dear Co-workers in Christ,

I pray God grants you and everyone in our parish family along with our friends and neighbors a blessed 2018! ***This Saturday, we have a special church service that some refer to as “Epiphany” and others call “Theophany”. Is there a difference, or do the two words mean the same?***

Sometimes people refer to January 6th as “Epiphany” and other times they say “Theophany.” *Is there a difference?* The word “Epiphany” refers to a sudden revelation or insight, a manifestation of a divine or supernatural being, and to the Western Christian world, the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12).



The word “Theophany” refers to a visible manifestation of God to humankind! In fact, the icon of Theophany depicts that for the first time in human history the divine revelation of all the Three Persons of God *together*... God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. That’s why I prefer using the term “Theophany”, since the Feast itself reveals the Holy Trinity as it was first revealed to humankind. The word “Theophany” perfectly describes the occasion when our Lord, Jesus Christ, was baptized at the age of 30, just before beginning His three-year witness of proclaiming the “Good News” of His Heavenly Father, which continues to be instilled and work in each of us through God’s Holy Spirit.

As an Orthodox Christian and especially as a Priest, the Feast of Theophany reminds me of the presence of God in the world at large, in my personal life, and throughout His Holy Body... the Church, which I serve together with you. To be able to drink and be sprinkled with the blessed waters from the *Agiasmos* Service

gives rise to thoughts of how I, like our Lord, Jesus Christ, was baptized and received God's Holy Spirit. I sense a connection with every Christian who has lived, is living, and will live. Through God's Holy Eucharist, I commune with God and His Holy Body; at the Feast of Theophany, it is a time for me to recall I was reborn with water and fire... God's Spirit. I feel refreshed, renewed. At this beginning of the new year, I am reminded of the potential we all have to begin afresh with God's will in mind.

On Sunday, January 7th, as I contemplate St. John the Baptist's role in assisting the Theophany of God to the world, I rejoice that as a Priest, I have been called and am blessed with the privilege of bringing others into the Body of Christ, just like St. John did 2,000 years ago as he preached a baptism of repentance and exhorted his brethren to repent, to prepare and make way for the Lord.

Just a week ago, at our Atlanta Winter Youth Rally, I was blessed to see a senior college student attending The Citadel in Charleston serve as an adult advisor to his parish's WYR participants. His life was influencing so many other lives... his kind words, his gentle attitude, his courage to proclaim his faith in Christ Jesus, his witness of God's love, mercy, and forgiveness. While his parents, Godparents, family, friends, teachers, and fellow students have helped shape him, I rejoiced to God that He gave me a small part in His plan to offer eternal life to Frank... I had the privilege of baptizing him as an infant. He was the first boy I ever baptized at the beginning of my priestly ministry. Now that he is an adult, I see the fruits of our collective labors and I give glory to God for blessing me with a spirit of joy for him, his family and friends. Like St. John the Baptist, I am reminded of the power of God's Spirit living and guiding us in our present world.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, I give glory to God for the privilege of serving God as one of His Priests. I thank you as well; St. Peter shared that the laity, all of you, are part of God's royal priesthood. As we remember the Theophany of our Lord and how it was carried out with the assistance of St. John the Baptist this Saturday and Sunday, I hope you will take a moment to rejoice and thank God for the precious gifts He has given to us. These gifts, like the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, exist in a spirit of love and forgiveness... they are offered by God to each of us to use and share. They reflect our fellowship, service, witness, and worship of the Triune God.

This Saturday and Sunday, I pray our parishes are filled with God's people. I pray His Spirit continues to stir us after the services. I trust God can stir our hearts and souls to go into the streets and various paths our 2018 will take us, so that we can find and invite those who have never been part of God's Body to know Him and become part of His Body. And for those who have been baptized yet feel apart from His Body, may He use us to offer them a life-saving sip from the Blessed Waters of 2018... physically and spiritually, so that they can know and live life together with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... now, and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen!

Faithfully yours,

+Fr. George