



## FROM CHRISTMAS TO THEOPHANY

**H**ow many feast-days, each one of Christ's mysteries, there are for me! All of which have one culmination, my perfection and renewal and return to the state of the first Adam. (St Gregory the Theologian, Sermon 38.16, On the Theophany, or Birthday of Christ)

As Christmas and Theophany approach, we too share in the grateful awe of St Gregory the Theologian's child-like exclamation. The appearance of God amongst men, both with the Incarnation of the Word and the revelation of the Holy Trinity at Christ's baptism in the Jordan River, far surpasses human logic and reason. Yet, we are called to participate in these visible manifestations of the Divine, even though we are lowly and flawed created beings.

These feasts are unified by the person of the Incarnate God Jesus Christ. They reveal both His humility and glory. As the Evangelist John so eloquently puts it, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

Though the feasts of Christmas and Theophany are separated by a period of time, both in the life of Christ and in the Church Calendar, they both point towards the perfection and renewal of Man. God condescends to take on our mortal flesh, so that we can be raised up with Him:

"Making yourself utterly poor like us, you have made our dust divine through union and participation." (Christmas canon, 5<sup>th</sup> Ode)

The Feast of Theophany also shows us the humility of Our Creator: "You wrapped yourself in the waters of the Jordan, O Saviour who puts on light as a garment; and You bowed Your head before the Forerunner, O Lord who measured heaven with the span of Your

hand." (Matins hymn of Theophany)

It is only through condescension and humility that we can live that one main point which these feasts culminate in, our renewal and perfection in Christ our God.

We humbly accept that we sin. We repent. We submit to the example of Christ's life. Only then, can we also attain glory in His glory. At Christmas we joyfully exclaim the Lord's birth, singing with the angelic hosts,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men," shouting out our hearts' joy at the Birth of the Redeemer. Also, at Theophany, we celebrate the enlightenment gifted to us by the Holy Trinity: "And we who are now illumined cry aloud, Glory be to God who appeared, and who was seen on earth, and who illumined the world."

From Christmas to Theophany, from condescension to Glory!!



# Ο Αγιασμός των Υδάτων και ο Φωτισμός της Κτίσεως

**Μ**ικρά παιδιά στη πατρίδα γυρίζαμε στα σπίτια μας τις μέρες του Μεγάλου Αγιασμού (5-Ιανουαρίου) και των Θεοφανείων (6-Ιανουαρίου) και ψάλλαμε:

**«Σήμερα τα Φώτα κι ο φωτισμός και χαρά μεγάλη κι' αγιασμός».**

Παράλληλα οι εκκλησιαστικοί ύμνοι της μεγάλης γιορτής, το ίδιο μήνυμα διαλαλούσαν στη δική τους γλώσσα και τον ήχο:

**«Σήμερον των υδάτων αγιάζεται η φύσις»,  
«Σήμερον η κτίσις φωτίζεται».**

Αγιασμός και φωτισμός λοιπόν, τα κοσμο-ιστορικά γεγονότα της γιορτής των Θεοφανείων. Θυμόμαστε τη Βάπτιση του Χριστού που αγιάζει τα ύδατα όλου του κόσμου. Για να καθαρίσει και να αναγεννήσει ολόκληρη την ανθρωπότητα και τον υλικό κόσμο. Η φυσική Δημιουργία του Θεού είναι το σπίτι μας. Ζούμε μέσα στη φύση, και τρεφόμαστε σωματικά απ' αυτήν. Ακόμη και η ψυχική μας ισορροπία εξαρτάται από το φυσικό περιβάλλον μας.

Το νερό αποτελεί το επικρατέστερο στοιχείο της φύσεως και όλης της Υδρογείου. Να γιατί με τη Βάπτιση του Χριστού αγιάζεται ολόκληρη η φυσική Δημιουργία. Γι' αυτό το λόγο στη γιορτή αυτή, η Εκκλησία μας θέλει να μας θυμίσει και την ευθύνη που έχουμε εμείς, τα λογικά όντα της Δημιουργίας του Θεού, απέναντι στη Φύση. Δηλαδή κάθε βεβήλωση απέναντι της, κάθε προσπάθεια να την υποτάσσουμε εγωστικά στις δικές μας ατομικές ανάγκες και επιθυμίες είναι ασέβεια εναντίον του ίδιου του Δημιουργού.

Η Φύση που τόσο ενεργά αγιάζει ο Χριστός στα Θεοφάνεια κατά κάποιον τρόπο "μεταμορφώνεται" και

προκαλεί τον άνθρωπο να γίνει κι αυτός πίο στοχαστικός και πίο πνευματικός στις σχέσεις του μαζί της. Ο Θεός διατηρεί άρρηκτες σχέσεις με το κόσμο. Δεν τον εγκατέλειψε μετά τη δημιουργία του. Συνεχώς προνοεί, φροντίζει, και διατηρεί την ισορροπία του, παρά τις πάμπολλες και επαναλαμβανόμενες προσβολές και επιθέσεις του ανθρώπου εναντίον της φύσεως.

Η κτίση αντανakλά στην ύπαρξη της τη ζωή και την ενέργειαν του Θεού. Έχει τη δυναμικότητα να μας οδηγήει στο Θεό. Στις ενέργειες Του και όχι φυσικά στην ουσία Του. Στην αγάπη Του, στη δυναμή Του, στη σοφία Του, στη δόξα Του. Συμβαίνει αυτό που λέει ο Απ. Παύλος: **«Τα αόρατα του Θεού»**, δηλαδή

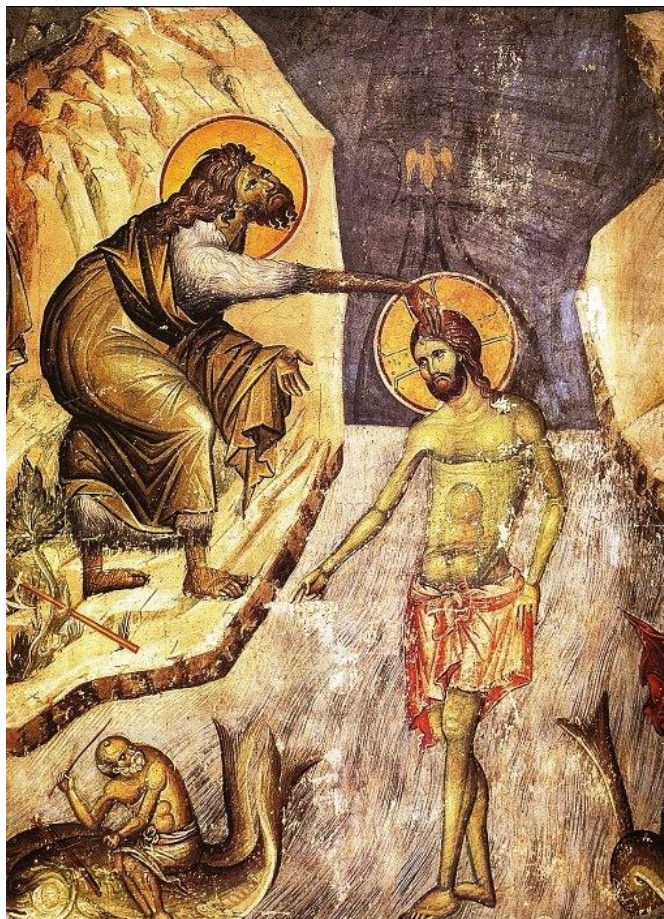
η δύναμη και η Θεότητα του γίνονται ορατά μέσω της κτίσεως. **(Ρωμ. Α' 20)**

Η κτίση κηρύττει τον Ποιητή. Οι νόμοι της παιδαγωγούν τον άνθρωπο και τον οδηγούν στην αρετή. Στο Μεγάλο Αγιασμό των Θεοφανείων ακούμε: **«Σε υμνεί ο ήλιος, σε δοξάζει σελήνη, σοί εντυγχάνει τα άστρα, σοί υπακούει το φώς, σε φρίπτουσιν άβυσσοι, σοί δουλεύουσιν αι πηγαί, πάσα η κτίσις ύμνησέ σε επιφανέντα».**

Με απλά λόγια, όλη η Δημιουργία εργάζεται, υπακούει, δοξάζει και ευχαριστεί ταυτόχρονα το Θεό για το Μεγαλείο Του. Και ακόμη συμμετέχει η ίδια και διακονεί στο μεγάλο γεγονός της Ευχαριστιακής Θυσίας. Αυτή μας παρέχει τον

άρτο και τον οίνο που με το Άγιο Πνεύμα μεταβάλλονται σε Σώμα και Αίμα Χριστού για να τρέφεται ο άνθρωπος και να ζεί αιώνια.

Αυτή είναι η ανεπανάληπτη αξία της αγιασμένης Δημιουργίας του Θεού. Αυτό είναι και το μήνυμα της Μεγάλης Τελετής του Αγιασμού των υδάτων και του Φωτισμού της κτίσεως.



# Current Issues

## The Power of Optimism

**T**he Second World War ended with the United States of America victors over the Japanese. To mark the event, a spectacular celebration was organised in Los Angeles. Over 100,000 people were present in an enormous stadium which was entirely converted into a theatre of war.

The ground shook as grenades exploded, tanks fired, various armours of war went off. Aircraft above the crowd made daring movements, causing fear but also generating a strong feeling of pride for the victorious nation. Flood lights of different colours added a realistic picture of what war can be like.

Suddenly the lights went out. The stadium went dark and absolutely silent for a while. Then a clear and imposing voice said, “Maybe you are saying to yourselves the storm around is frightening. Evil forces are decimating everything. Moral darkness has taken control of society. I am not in a position to help. My abilities are limited. I feel my light is that of a match, but what is needed are floodlights of goodness and virtue to stop the advance of evil. My answer is that you are wrong. I will prove it to you.”

At that moment the speaker lights up a match, “Can you now see the light of a flame?” Everybody could see the shimmer of light in the darkness. “Suppose now, that everyone here lights up a match. Please try it.” Rustling noises were heard all over the stadium, as people tried to light a match or their lighters. Within a minute, almost 100,000 small flames filled the area with light.

War is a devastating experience, both for the victor and the defeated, leaving them in a degraded state materially as well as morally. All of this because good, sensible, responsible people felt that they could not do anything to stop the force of the coming evil.

If we transpose the optimistic attitude of the speaker to the spiritual sphere,

we realise that we can make an enormous difference if we have the courage to act, if we face the evil and devious forces in our environment, if we resist all these with courage. If this resistance is made by several, many, or thousands of Christian hearts, the results can be astounding.

It is a mistake for young persons to condemn themselves to inactivity. To simply criticise the wrongs of our society, Government actions, or high-standing people, solves nothing. “It is preferable to light a candle, rather than to curse the darkness,” says a Chinese proverb. What is the point of throwing stones against the huge waves, that toss the boat here and there, endangering the lives of those in it? Light a lamp in the lighthouse so the captain can avoid the rocks and save the boat and its people. Throw life jackets to the shipwrecked people.

Concentrate your strength, encourage others to do the same, and you will see thousands of small flames pushing away the darkness. Remember Him who supports you, “Do not fear the little flock, for it is your Father’s pleasure to give you the kingdom!” (Luke 12:32). We all know the stakes are high, but the rewards are unbelievable, both on Earth and in Heaven!



## Από Τους Αγίους Της Εκκλησίας Μας

## From the Saints of our Church

**Ο Άγιος Αμβρόσιος επίσκοπος Μεδιολάνων**  
(Η μνήμη του τιμάται 7<sup>η</sup> Δεκεμβρίου)

**St Ambrose of Milan**  
(Commemorated 7<sup>th</sup> December)

Ο Άγιος Αμβρόσιος Μεδιολάνων ήταν ένας Επίσκοπος ο οποίος τον αγαπούσε ιδιαίτερα το ποιμνίο του, ο λαός της πόλεως των Μεδιολάνων, μαζί με τους Αυτοκράτορες της Ανατολικής Ρωμαϊκής Αυτοκρατορίας που τον συμβουλευόνταν.

Γεννήθηκε στη Τρέβηρα το 340 μ.Χ. και απέκτησε μια άριστη εκπαίδευση, με γνώση των Ελληνικών και Λατινικών γλώσσων. Διορίστηκε Ανθύπατος των Μεδιολάνων και διοίκησε χρησιμοποιώντας τις Χριστιανικές αρετές της αγάπης και δικαιοσύνης.

Ήταν τόσο αγαπητός που ανακηρύχθηκε Επίσκοπος από τον λαό των Μεδιολάνων και βαπτίστηκε μετά την εκλογή του!

Ως Επίσκοπος, ο Άγιος Αμβρόσιος ήταν πολυγραφότατος εκκλησιαστικός συγγραφέας και κήρυκας, με ομιλίες, επιστολές και άλλα συγγράμματα που εξηγούσαν την Αγία Γραφή και τα δόγματα της Εκκλησίας, μαζί με έργα ηθικού και ασκητικού περιεχομένου. Η ευγλωττία του, η ειλικρίνεια του και ο τρόπος της ζωής του τραβούσαν πολλούς κοντά του, όπως τον Ιερό Αυγουστίνo, τον οποίον εβάφτισε.

Όταν ο Αυτοκράτορας Θεοδόσιος έδωσε εντολή να σφαγούν 7,000 Θεσσαλονικείς σαν τιμωρία για εξέγερση εναντίον της φρουράς του, ο Άγιος Αμβρόσιος τον σταμάτησε να μπει στον Ναό και τον ενθάρρυνε να μετανοήσει, λέγοντας: «Ήρθε αντιμέτωπος με τον πειρασμό. Πρέπει να τον κυριαρχήσεις. Δεν συγχωρείται η αμαρτία χωρίς δάκρυα και μετάνοια. Κανένας άγγελος ή Αρχάγγελος μπορεί να την αφαιρέσει. Μόνον ο ίδιος ο Θεός μπορεί να πει, «Είμαι μαζί σου.» Αν δεν μετανοήσουμε δεν μας συγχωρεί. Σε προτρέπω, σου ζητώ, σε ικετεύω, σε προειδοποιώ, διότι θλίβομαι πως εσύ, που ήσουν υπόδειγμα ευσεβείας και επιείκίας, που ούτε τους ένοχους εγκληματίες δέν επιτρέπεις να ρθουν σε κίνδυνο, δέν θλίβεσαι που τόσοι άθωοι σκοτώθηκαν.»

Ο Αυτοκράτορας ανταποκρίθηκε και μετάνοισε δημοσίως για το παράπτωμα του, εμφανιζόμενος στο καθεδρικό Ναό των Μεδιολάνων φορώντας σάκκο και ασκεπής, ταπεινά ζητώντας συγχώρηση.

Τα άμπολλα αποκαλυπτικά και πνευματικώς εποικοδομητικά έργα του Αγίου Αμβροσίου είναι απόδειξη της θυσίας του αφοσιωμένου ιεραποστόλου του Θεού. Η Ορθόδοξη ζωή και νοοτροπία του, είναι παράδειγμα για τους Χριστιανούς κάθε εποχής.

St Ambrose of Milan was a profoundly inspiring Bishop who was well loved by the people of Milan and by the Byzantine emperors who sought his guidance.

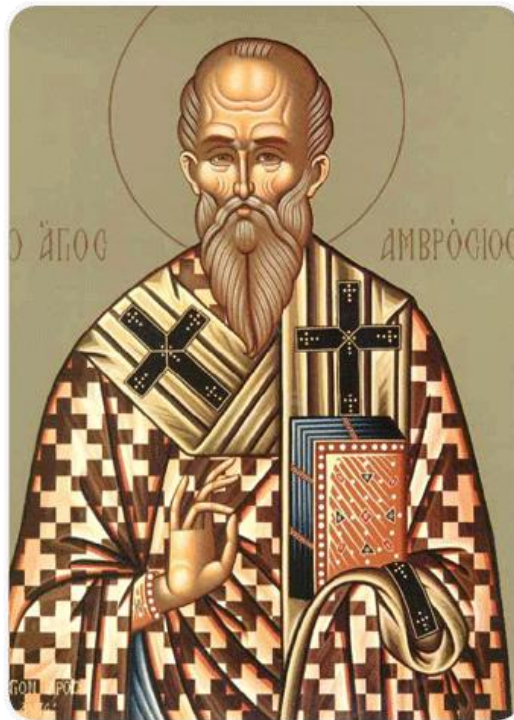
He was born in 340AD at Trier and became well-educated, having learnt both Greek and Latin. He was appointed Governor of Milan and ruled with the Christian virtues of love and fair justice, being attributes with which he was raised. He was so loved that he was elected as Bishop by the people of Milan, and was not baptised until after his election! As Bishop St Ambrose wrote prolifically and delivered sermons, letters, hymns, epigrams and other titles in which he covered a range of areas: exegetical, dogmatic, moral, and ascetic. His eloquence, sincerity and way of life won over many, including St Augustine, whom he baptised.

When Emperor Theodosius ignored St Ambrose's advice and massacred 7,000 Thessalonians for rioting against his soldiers, St Ambrose encouraged the Emperor to repent, stating, "You have met temptation – conquer it. Sin is not removed except by tears and penance. No angel or archangel can remove it; it is God Himself who alone can

say: 'I am with you'; if we have sinned, He does not forgive us unless we do penance. I urge, I ask, I beg, I warn, for my grief is that you, who were a model of unheard-of piety, who had reached the apex of clemency, who would not allow the guilty to be in peril, are not now mourning that so many guiltless have perished."

In response, Emperor Theodosius publicly submitted to penance, presenting himself in the cathedral of Milan bare-headed and dressed in a sackcloth to acknowledge his misdeeds and humbly beg forgiveness.

St Ambrose's many revealing and spiritually uplifting writings are a testament to the hard work of this devoted missionary of God. His Orthodox life and way of thinking is an example and inspiration to all Christians.



# Questions & Answers

A clergyman of our Archdiocese answers ...

## *What do I do if there's no Orthodox Church near me ?*

**W**hen our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was asked, "teach us to pray", he started with the words "Our Father". He did not say "my father". In this way he was teaching us that it is not "God and me", rather it is "God and us".

Common worship means coming together as a group and worshipping God, with prayer, doxology, song, with our hearts, our minds and our bodies, together in one space. This is a foundational aspect, not only of the Orthodox Church, but of the whole of creation.

The other aspect of common worship is that we get to see each other, we talk to each other, we embrace, we share a meal, we give each other strength, friendship, advice and love. We are family.

Finally, it is only in the embrace of common worship where we can partake of the sacraments. It is only together that we will eat and drink the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is our spiritual food and drink, giving us strength to fight the good fight.

So, the question is, what if there is no Orthodox Church nearby. The answer is, go to the nearest church as often as you can afford. There are many people today who are happy to travel 300 km or more, to attend church on a Sunday. There are others who travel 500 km and sleepover in another city so that they can attend church in the morning. There are priests who travel over a thousand kilometres on a weekend just so that these people can worship together. So, how far is too far? Well? How strong is your passion for Christ? How much do you love your Orthodox Christian family? How far are you willing to go to share worship and communion with them?



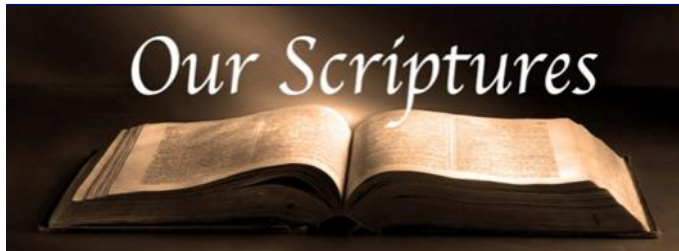
And when it is truly impossible? Then stand before your icons, light your kandili and your incense burner, read the typika prayers which can be found in the Orthodox prayer books. Chant with your own voice as many hymns as you can. Read and contemplate the gospel reading for the day. In this way you show both to yourself and to the Lord how much you miss your family who are at this time gathered in worship in churches far away and all over the planet.

After this, sit and read a spiritual text, perhaps the life of a saint for an hour or two. Before you know it, you will have spent half of your Sunday with the Lord.

Of course, in this modern day we also have technology allowing us to watch the divine services or sermons over the Internet, on television or on the radio. Some websites, such as [www.agesinitiatives.com](http://www.agesinitiatives.com), allow you to read the full text of the worship services for each day.

All these acts of personal worship are blessed and they increase your appetite for the next opportunity when you can travel to the nearest Orthodox Church for common worship, to taste the Kingdom of Heaven, in which you will never be alone.

† Fr N. S.



## The Flight to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15)

This scene starts with the Magi departing Bethlehem and the angel warning Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt lest Herod kill Christ. It is symbolic that the Magi did not return to Jerusalem but went on to Persia instead. Babylon is often represented in the Bible, especially in Psalms and Revelation, as a place of sin. It was to this place that the Magi were commissioned as teachers to redeem the sinful land.

A similar redemption occurs in Egypt which, together with Babylon, was described by St John Chrysostom as the most 'burnt up in the flame of ungodliness'. That Christ sent the Magi to Babylon and Himself and His mother to Egypt shows the mercy of God working so that all people might be saved.

This flight to Egypt also has symbolic significance, showing us how it was prefigured in the Old Testament. Christ going down to Egypt and returning was prefigured by the migration to Egypt by the blessed Jacob and his sons (Genesis 46) and the return of the Israelites to Canaan through the Passover (Exodus 14). It was also the fulfilment of the prophecy in Hosea 11:1, that the Son would be called out of Egypt.

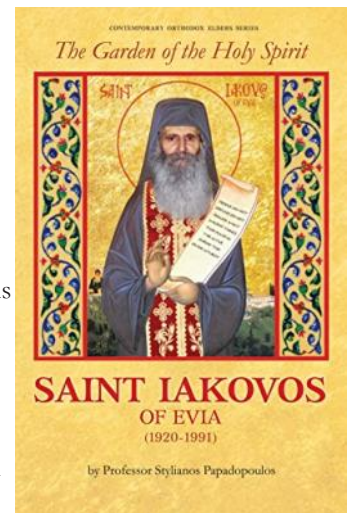
The flight to Egypt also adds to our understanding of the struggles of Christ and the Theotokos, who had to flee as political refugees and suffer a journey of tribulation. St John Chrysostom says that we should have this as an example of how we should be prepared to suffer tribulation in the spiritual life. It shows us yet again how much Christ, the all-powerful God, humbled Himself and endured tribulation from persecution. It also shows us the virtue of Joseph, whose obedience led him to follow the angel without hesitation, fleeing that very night and remaining in Egypt until the angel told him that it was safe to return.



## The Garden of the Holy Spirit: Saint Iakovos of Evia by Professor Stylianos Papadopoulos Published by Orthodox Witness 2018

The Garden of the Holy Spirit is a spiritual biography describing the life of a contemporary Greek Orthodox Elder, Iakovos Tsalikis, abbot of the Monastery of Saint David in Evia, Greece.

The Elder's biography begins with his family's flight as refugees from Asia Minor to the island of Evia. It follows with a description of the Elder's early life, especially his upbringing in the faith by his pious mother, his asceticism, and his love for prayer and the sacred Church services.



From a young age, the spiritual diligence and self-sacrifice of Iakovos was rewarded by God with an abundance of spiritual gifts, and the book recounts miraculous instances of the power of his prayers. At one time when the children of his village contracted mumps, their parents gathered them all to see Iakovos who was then just a teenager. After reading prayers for them and blessing them, the children instantly became well.

After the patient struggles of Iakovos in the world, he entered into the monastery of St David. There, the young monk faced harsh trials as he performed his monastic duties. He endured temptations from the older monks as well as the demons.

The author imparts his intimate knowledge of St Iakovos' ascetic practices which enables the reader to follow his path to sanctity. Apart from the labours of his monastic obedience and frequent illnesses, St Iakovos undertook the further spiritual exercise of keeping all-night prayer vigils at the hermitage of his predecessor, St David of Evia.

His asceticism and patience formed him into a charismatic Elder with spiritual vision. The gifts he was graced with included seeing angels and saints before him when serving at the altar, and seeing the sins of those who came to him during confession before they opened their mouths. Many more examples of St Iakovos' spiritual gifts are given in the book which acquaint the reader with the life and spiritual journey of this inspirational modern Orthodox saint.

# Orthodox Saints of the World

**G**o therefore and *make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.* (Matthew 28:19-20)

This Commandment of our Lord also applies to all Christians from every age in history; every person and every nation who has ever existed. It is reflected in the Creed that Orthodox Christians pray every day when we boldly proclaim: 'I believe in One, Holy, Catholic and **Apostolic** Church'.

What does **Apostolic** mean?

**Apostolic** has three distinct, yet interconnected, meanings: 1. There is a physical continuity between the Apostles and the Church of today through the Mystery of Holy Ordination;

2. There is a Spiritual continuity of the teachings and traditions of the Apostles which have remained unchanged within the Church;

and, 3. The Apostolic mission of preaching God's Word and making 'disciples of all nations' is at the core of our Faith.

The Synaxarion (books with the lives of the Saints) contains Saints of all cultural backgrounds, all ages, all geographical locations, all with different paths to holiness: monastics or married, physicians or fools for Christ, Patriarchs, and simple people. All are unified by their Faith in Christ.

From the time of the Chief Apostles Saints Peter and Paul, the Way spread from Jerusalem to Antioch, where the followers of the Way were first called Christians (Acts 11:19-26). It continued through Greece, Italy, the rest of Europe, Asia Minor, Egypt, Ethiopia, and as far as India.

In addition to the many martyrs the Church has many early Saints who followed the path of the Apostles with zeal. They include St Nina

Enlightener of Georgia, St Patrick Apostle of Ireland, St Olga of Kiev, St Gregory Illuminator of Armenia, St Sava the Enlightener of Serbia, Saints Cyril and Methodius and their disciples, St Olaf King & Enlightener of Norway, St Remigius, Apostle to the Franks, and St Alban Protomartyr of Britain.

We also have more recent Apostles and missionaries to the 'New World': St Innocent of Alaska, St Alexis of Wilkes-Barre, leader of ex-Uniates into Orthodoxy, St John Maximovitch, Archbishop of Shanghai and San Francisco, St Raphael Hawaweeny of Brooklyn, St Peter the Aleut, the Protomartyr of America, among many others.

In Australia Orthodoxy came through mass migration from Europe, by those fleeing from poverty and war. Fr Roman Braga (a Priest who has imprisoned and tortured in Romania during Communism) says that this was part of God's plan to bring Orthodoxy here.

We are now blessed with

Apostles and Missionaries in countries where Orthodox Christianity is unknown, such as Archbishop Chrysostomos in Albania, Fr Themistocles Adamopoulos in Sierra Leone, Metropolitan Amphilochios and Archimandrite Meletios in Fiji and Tonga, Fr Chrysostomos Manalu in Medan, Indonesia, and new Orthodox missions being established in East Timor and Samoa.

This article is the first amongst a series which will describe the Saints and their missions all over the world. We hope that their lives and zeal will be edifying and inspiring for all faithful Orthodox Christians.

# Η Σύναξη της Θεοτόκου

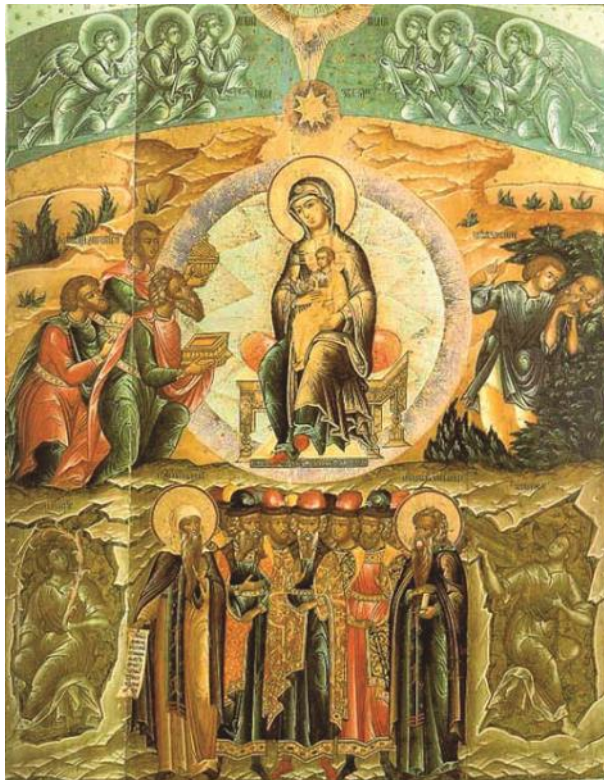
**Σ**ύμφωνα με την παράδοση της ορθόδοξης Εκκλησίας μας, μετά από κάθε σημαντικό γεγονός που συνδέεται με τον ερχομό του Θεού στον κόσμο για τη σωτηρία του ανθρώπου, εορτάζεται η σύναξη του προσώπου που έπαιξε πρωταγωνιστικό ρόλο σ' αυτό, όπως μετά τη Βάπτιση του Χριστού έχουμε τη Σύναξη του Αγίου Ιωάννη του Βαπτιστή, έτσι μετά τη Γέννησή Του έχουμε τη **Σύναξη της Θεοτόκου**.

Η κάθε Σύναξη προεκτείνει, εμβαθύνει στο νόημα της γιορτής και επαναλαμβάνει τους περισσότερους ύμνους της. Συνεπώς, η Σύναξη της Παναγίας τονίζει τη Γέννηση του Κυρίου και δίνει έμφαση στην πραγματικότητα της Σάρκωσής Του από την αιεσιάρθενο Θεοτόκο.

Σήμερα ίσως δεν αντιλαμβανόμαστε πόση σημασία έχει αυτό. Στους πρώτους όμως χριστιανικούς χρόνους ήταν πολύ σημαντικό, γιατί οι αιρετικοί αμφισβητούσαν την ενανθρώπιση του Χριστού.

Έφριτταν στη σκέψη ότι ο Θεός πήρε πραγματική ανθρώπινη σάρκα, ενώ ο άγιος Ιωάννης ο Θεολόγος τονίζει ότι από την αποδοχή ή όχι της σάρκωσης του Θεού φανερώνεται κανείς ως χριστιανός ή όχι. Αυτή την αλήθεια επιβεβαιώνει η Σύναξη της Παναγίας, αλλά και το γεγονός ότι από όλα τα δώρα που προσέφερε η δημιουργία του Θεού προς ευχαριστία

για την αποστολή του Υιού Του, το ανώτερο, το ωραιότερο και το καλύτερο όλων είναι το δώρο του ίδιου του ανθρώπου, η Παναγία Παρθένος, που με την προσφορά του εαυτού της έγινε συνεργός στο υπέρτατο μυστήριο της λυτρώσεως των ανθρώπων, γι' αυτό και αποκαλείται μεσίτρια του ανθρωπίνου γένους, καταφυγή και προστασία!



Η Εκκλησία «**Συνάγεται**» ακόμα προς τιμή της Παναγίας για να ευχηθεί στη Μητέρα του Θεού, να της εκφράσει την ευγνωμοσύνη της, να τη συγχαρεί για τη Γέννα του Θεανθρώπου και να προσκυνήσει το νεογέννητο Λυτρωτή της. Γιατί η **Παναγία είναι η εκπρόσωπός μας στον Ουρανό, Εκείνη που έδωσε το αίμα και τη σάρκα της προκειμένου να γίνει άνθρωπος ο ίδιος ο Θεός και αποτελεί πάντοτε την ελπίδα και την παρηγοριά μας. Προς χάρη Της η όποια προσευχή μας εισακούεται από τον Θεό.**

Ας ευχόμαστε ταπεινά η Χάρη της να ευλογεί, όλα τα έργα μας, να μας δυναμώνει και να μας στηρίζει στις δύσκολες μέρες που διερχόμαστε. Να μας ενισχύει ώστε να ζούμε με μετάνοια και αγάπη γνήσια μεταξύ μας και με τις ικεσίες της να μας αξιώσει και της ουράνιας βασιλείας, όπου συμβασιλεύει με τον Υιό της.



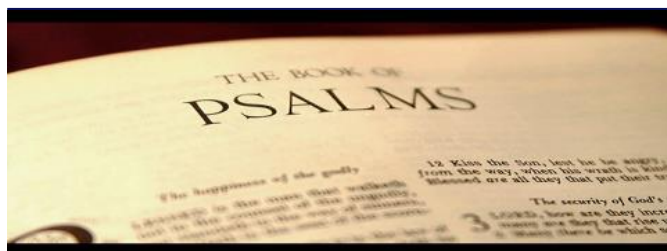
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Find out more information about the history and activities of the Greek Orthodox Christian Society such as Sunday Schools, Youth Fellowships, the Sydney School of Byzantine Chant and Orthodox Bookstore, and subscribe to our bi-monthly update.





## The Psalms

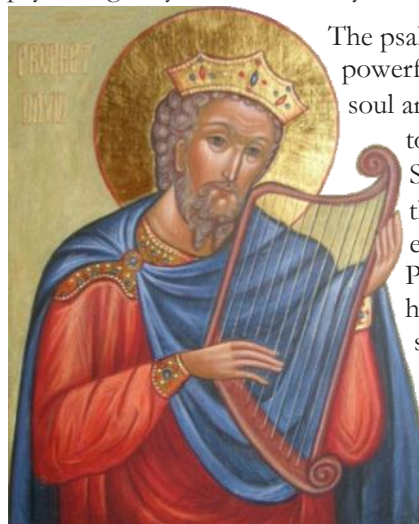
The book of Psalms (Psalter) in the Old Testament consists of 150 psalms. It contains divinely-inspired hymns and poems traditionally ascribed to the Holy Prophet and King David, although many were authored by others such as Moses and temple musicians.

The Psalms are the prayer-book of the Church and are used in services more than any other book of Holy Scripture. They form the core of each of the services of the Daily Cycle and the Divine Liturgy. So prevalent are they in Orthodox worship that St John Chrysostom observed that wherever one looks in the Church, they will find the Psalter 'first, last, and central.'

The Psalms serve many functions: foretelling coming events; recalling history; giving laws for life; revealing what must be done to obey God's word; and helping to overcome passions that exercise dominion over our souls. All states of a person's soul standing before God, and virtually every aspect of worship, is expressed in the psalms: praising, thanking, blessing, rejoicing, interceding, petitioning, repenting, lamenting, questioning, and even complaining.

The psalms use the power of poetic expression and melody to capture and gradually transform our thoughts. They provide serenity and peace to the soul, soften the soul's wrath, form friendships, unite those separated and help us in our trials, temptations and tribulations.

St Arsenios of Cappadocia referred to psalms that assist in specific circumstances: Psalm 3 to help malice leave a person; Psalm 22 to ask God to tame disobedient children; Psalm 38 to help with troublemakers; Psalm 55 to help people who are extremely sensitive and have been psychologically and emotionally scarred by other people.



The psalms have such a powerful effect on the soul and are so integral to our lives that St Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain encourages us to Psalmody in our heart the spiritual songs of the Church wherever we may be: at our home, where we work, where we walk, and everywhere else.



## Elder Aimilianos

Elder Aimilianos was born in Athens in 1934 to refugees from Asia Minor. As a young man, he was active in the church both as a youth leader and in catechism duties.

Leaving high school, he entered theological college graduating in 1959. Considering ordination as a priest prior to pursuing the role of a foreign



missionary, he was directed to Bishop Dionysios of Trikala, who was reviving monastic life in Meteora. Becoming his spiritual child, elder Aimilianos was tonsured a monk and enrolled in the monastery of St Bessarion.

There, he was granted a profound mystical experience of the light of God, resulting in him dedicating his life to the ascetic tradition of our church and forsaking his previous ambitions.

As a spell-binding preacher, the elder took the region captive, especially its youth. In a relatively short span of time, Meteora had become home to a large community of young monks! An equal number of women, many related to the monks, also heard the call to monastic life. Within a few years, however, the increasing presence of tourism began to disrupt the spiritual life of the new communities. Hope, however, was found with the aged fathers of the monastery of Simonopetra, who invited the elder and his brotherhood to settle on Mt Athos, and bring new life to their dying community. In 1973, elder Aimilianos was elected abbot of Simonopetra. The presence of the elder and his brotherhood was a critical factor in the contemporary renewal of monastic life on the peninsula.

Elder Aimilianos was also seeking a place for his community of nuns. In the town of Ormylia, the monastery of Vatopedi possessed an old unused dependency, which Simonopetra purchased, restored and extended. The subsequent convent is dedicated to the Annunciation of the Theotokos.

From 1995, elder Aimilianos began to suffer from an increasingly debilitating illness, forcing him to step down as abbot of Simonopetra. His legacy endures eternally.



## What we Hear in Church



### Matins Hymn of Theophany (6th January)

#### Ἐξαποστειλάριον τῆς Ἑορτῆς (Ἦχος γ')

Ἐπεφάνη ὁ Σωτήρ, ἡ χάρις ἡ ἀλήθεια, ἐν ρείθροις τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, καὶ τοὺς ἐν σκότει καὶ σκιᾷ, καθεύδοντας ἐφώτισε• καὶ γὰρ ἦλθεν ἐφάνη, τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀπρόσιτον.

The Saviour who is grace and truth, appeared in the streams of the Jordan, and illumined those sleeping in darkness and shadow, and came now and shone, the unapproachable light.

It is not by chance that this Feast-day of Our Lord, the Feast of Theophany, is called the Festival of Lights. St John the Evangelist in his first Epistle is definitive: "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:15). St Gregory the Theologian follows in the same vein, in his sermon on Holy Baptism: "God is Light: the highest, the unapproachable, the ineffable." But even so, in the person of Jesus Christ and in His Baptism which we celebrate on 6th January, this light is imparted to all of Creation, especially to humans who were created in His image and likeness.

St John Chrysostom clarifies for us why this day is called Theophany and not the day Christ was born: "Until this time He was not known to the people. And that the people did not know Him, Who He was, listen about this to John the Baptist, who says: 'but there stands One among you whom you do not know.' (Jn.1:26). And is it surprising that others did not know Him, when even the Baptist did not know Him until that day?" It is obvious here, that the Holy Father is referring to Christ being made known to all, through His Baptism, as the second Person of the Holy Trinity.

There had been previous forms of Baptism, these being baptism according to the law of Moses, for ritual cleansing, then the baptism of St John the Forerunner as a sign for spiritual regeneration. However, none of these had the power to forgive sins and illumine souls. St John the Baptist himself, explains this for us: "I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matthew 3:11)

In Jesus, grace and truth are personified, which is why we chant this hymn out of gratitude, recognising that only He brings illumination to our souls and bodies.



## From the Holy Fathers...

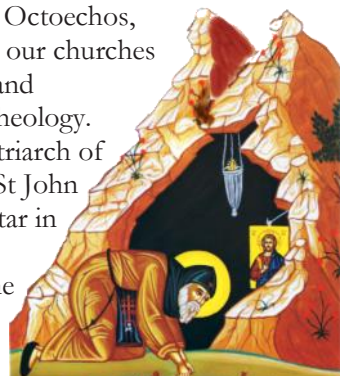
### St John of Damascus - A Brilliant Star

The chief hymnographer of our Church is how he is described in his Apolytikion. Yet, St John of Damascus was much more: a theologian, philosopher, poet and musician. These talents are interwoven throughout his substantial works.

He wrote and composed music for hymns in each of the eight modes of the Octoechos comprising a large section of the Sunday Orthros and Saturday Vespers services (including the eight resurrectional apolytikia and associated theotokia and the canons). Added to this are the idiomela hymns used in the funeral service, and many other hymns we read in the daily cycle of prayers. His anthology of over sixty canons for major feast days, prophets, apostles, hierarchs and martyrs are particularly significant. They include the canon for Pascha, the Annunciation, the Ascension, Pentecost, Christmas and Theophany.

In addition, he wrote many theological works. The most famous is *The Fount of Knowledge*, comprised of *The Philosophical Chapters*, *The Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* (underpinning systematic dogmatic theology), and *On Heresies* (where he uncovers one hundred heresies). He is renowned for his extensive defence of icons during the iconoclastic crisis for which he was punished by the cutting off of his right hand. It was miraculously restored following his fervent prayers to the Theotokos! Later, the Seventh Ecumenical Council referenced his work *On Holy Images* in support of restoring icons.

As we celebrate the feast of this brilliant saint, let us remember and honour his great contribution to our Church. He embellished our services with captivating hymns, enriched our ecclesiastical music by adding variation and mood with the Octoechos, fought for the right to adorn our churches with beautiful iconography, and preserved the purity of our theology. His biographer, John VII Patriarch of Jerusalem, rightly described St John of Damascus as "a brilliant star in the ecclesiastical firmament, shining with steady rays in the dark night of heresy."





## The Church Mysteries

**T**he Church exists to lead the faithful to the Love, the Light, and the Life in Christ through His sacred Mysteries that are offered in the sacramental life of the church.

The sacraments in the Orthodox Church are called the 'Holy Mysteries'. There are seven sacraments: Baptism, Chrismation, Holy Eucharist, Confession, Marriage, Ordination and Holy Unction. However, the Mysteries of the Church are not limited to these but rather encompass all things of a mystical nature in the Church. These can include, and are not limited to, the service for the burial of the dead, monastic tonsuring, blessing of the waters at Epiphany, blessing of homes, etc.

The sacraments, like the Church, are both visible and invisible. In every sacrament there is a combination of an outward visible sign with an inward spiritual grace. St John Chrysostom wrote that they are called mysteries because what we believe is not the same as what we see. For instance, at Baptism the Christian undergoes an outward washing in water, but at the same time is cleansed inwardly from their sins. Similarly, at the Eucharist what visibly appears to be bread and wine is in reality the Body and Blood of Christ that is offered.

In most of the sacraments the Church takes material things such as water, bread, wine, oil and makes them a vehicle of the Holy Spirit. In this way the sacraments look back to the Incarnation, when Christ took material flesh and made it a vehicle of the Holy Spirit.

The sacraments are personal to each one of us. They are the means whereby God's Grace is appropriated to every Christian individually. For this reason the priest mentions the Christian name of each person as he administers the sacrament.

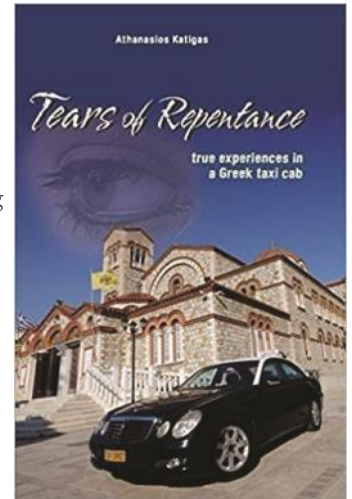
The Church with all Her Mysteries, transforms us, sanctifies us, and brings us into Communion with God, and a life in Christ.



## Tears of Repentance

**Saint Nicodemos Publications, 2015**

**T**he book 'Tears of Repentance' was written by Athanasios (Thanasi) Katigas, a taxi driver in Thessaloniki, Greece. It contains a compilation of a few of Thanasi's life-changing experiences through his spiritually rewarding conversations and interactions with passengers. These events were initially hidden by Thanasi, however in obedience to his spiritual father he has since humbly written the book to glorify Christ and to benefit many.



Throughout his book Thanasi stresses the importance of repentance, confession and Holy Communion, the "boarding pass" to heaven. The chapter 'My New Birthday' expresses these points.

Through God's providence Thanasi found himself in a dead-end street where he picked up an elderly gentleman on his way to Thessaloniki. Whilst the passenger conversed about politics Thanasi politely interrupted him and stated that in order for Greece's politics to change for the better "each of us must personally seek change and cultivate it inside himself first", starting by studying the New Testament. The man agreed, stating that he was a religious person who had been to Jerusalem and communed during major feasts. Thanasi then asked him if he had ever gone to confession and sincerely repented. The man responded that he hadn't. Thanasi responded, "Then believe me, you have done absolutely nothing, it is difficult opening our hearts to admit our faults and our sins so all the collected debris can come out, but only then, with a clean conscience and properly prepared, can we partake of the body of Christ."

Like many other passengers at the end of their conversations, the elderly man was in tears and promised Thanasi that he would go straight to confession and celebrate this day as his 'Real Birthday'.

This book has many other stories which reveal Thanasi's deep love for God and those he encounters. They are of benefit to us and epitomise the true Christian spirit which we should aspire to have.

A wide range of Orthodox Christian books is available from the Orthodox Mission Bookstore, 217 Bexley Road, Kingsgrove.  
Tel: (02) 9787 9779 E-mail: editor@lychnos.org  
Internet: www.orthodoxbookstore.org.au

# NEWS & VIEWS

## Sunday School Concerts

The Sunday Schools of the Orthodox parishes of Sydney held their annual concerts throughout the months of November and December to celebrate the end of another successful year.

The aim of Sunday School is to encourage our children to love our Lord Jesus Christ, and to understand His unconditional love for us and how importantly we need Him in our daily lives. His Eminence, Archbishop Stylianos, wrote the following message in a memento given to all the children:

My dear child,

Now that the lessons of our Sunday School have finished once again with God's blessing, I want to remind you of the most striking truths, which they would have left in your conscience. First, that God brought the world into existence from non-existence. And this occurred out of great love, so that every person could come to know of His blessedness, making us feel like a small God ourselves within the love of God. Second, that such great love of God for each person and the world obliges us also to love one another sincerely, and all of us to love Creation, which is the home of us all. Third, to have perseverance, faith and bravery in the face of any failures or misfortunes in life, knowing that only after death there is no "pain, sorrow, or suffering."

With much fatherly love Archbishop STYLIANOS.

Sunday Schools will resume again in March 2019. For more information, contact your local parish priest.



The students of All Saints Parish, Belmore, performing at their annual Sunday School concert



The students of the Parish of St Michael, Crows Nest, performing at their annual Sunday School concert



The students of the Parish of St Catherine, Mascot, performing at their annual Sunday School concert

**Ακούτε το ραδιοφωνικό πρόγραμμα  
«Η ΦΩΝΗ ΤΗΣ ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΙΑΣ»**

**κάθε Κυριακή:**

**10:45 π.μ. στο 2MM-AM 1665**

**11:00 π.μ. στο 2ERA-FM 151.675 (scanner)**

**5:30 μ.μ. στο Galaxia FM 151.850 (scanner)**

**κάθε Πέμπτη:**

**3:30 μ.μ. στο Radio Club AM 1683**

**« ΛΥΧΝΟΣ »**

**is a bimonthly publication of the  
Greek Orthodox Christian Society,  
under the auspices of the  
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia.**

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