

# ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST ORTHODOX CHURCH

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America Diocese of Los Angeles and the West

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JANUARY 2, 2022



# St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America Diocese of Los Angeles and the West

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**JANUARY 2, 2022**

## **FOREFEAST OF THE THEOPHANY OF CHRIST**

On January 2 in the Holy Orthodox Church, the first day of the Forefeast of the Theophany of Christ, we commemorate our Father among the Saints Sylvester, Pope of Rome.

*Pope Sylvester, who even when dead, yet liveth,*

*Quicken'd a dead ox, shaming magician Jambres.*

*At daybreak on the second, Sylvester breatheth forth his soul.*

Sylvester was born in Rome, and from his early youth was learned in worldly wisdom and in the Faith of Christ. He always conducted his life according to the Gospel commandments. He benefited much from the instruction of Timothy the priest, whose death for the true faith Sylvester witnessed. Thus, he was imbued with just such a spirit throughout his entire life. He became Bishop of Rome at age thirty. By his prayers and miracles, Sylvester assisted in bringing Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena to baptism. With the Empress Helena, he took part in finding the Honorable Cross. He governed the Church of God for twenty years. His earthly life ended honorably and he entered into the Heavenly Kingdom.

On this day, we also commemorate Cosmas the wonderworker, archbishop of Constantinople; and the repose of Venerable Seraphim of Sarov.

*By their holy intercessions, O God, have mercy upon us and save us. Amen.*



### **RESURRECTIONAL APOLYTIKION IN TONE THREE**

Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad, for the Lord hath done a mighty act with His own arm. He hath trampled down death by death, and become the first-born from the dead. He hath delivered us from the depths of Hades, granting the world the Great Mercy.

### **APOLYTIKION OF THE FOREFEAST OF THEOPHANY IN TONE FOUR**

Be thou ready, Zabulon; prepare thyself, O Nephthalim. \* River Jordan, stay thy course and skip for gladness to receive \* the Sovereign Master, Who cometh now to be baptized. \* O Adam, be thou glad with our first mother, Eve; \* hide not as ye did of old in Paradise. \* Seeing you naked, He hath appeared now \* to clothe you in the first robe again. \* Christ hath appeared, for He truly willeth to renew all creation.

### **KONTAKION OF THE FOREFEAST OF THEOPHANY IN TONE FOUR**

In the running waters of \* the Jordan River, \* on this day the Lord of all \* crieth to John: Be not afraid \* and hesitate not to baptize Me, \* for I am come to save Adam, the first-formed man.

### **THE EPISTLE**

*O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance. Unto Thee will I cry, O Lord my God.*

#### **The Reading from the Second Epistle of St. Paul to St. Timothy. (4:5-8)**

Timothy, my son, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing.

### **THE GOSPEL**

#### **The reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Mark. (1:1-8)**

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "After me comes He Who is mightier than I, the strap of Whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

**WISDOM:** *Fr. Stephen Freeman, [Glory to God for All things, Dec. 24, 2021](#)*

This Christmas was the last Christmas—ever.

Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. Wherever He is, there is the beginning and the end of all things. If Christ is truly present in this year's Christmas, then it is the last Christmas—and the first Christmas. And if statements like this make your hair hurt—then read on.

Our common way of thinking about the world is marked by the linear passage of time (it moves from past to present to future) and by cause and effect (everything is caused by something else). And we think of the two things together (a cause always happens before the effect). That being the case, we would never say that what someone is going to do tomorrow caused something to happen yesterday. I hope this seems obvious.

It is therefore not at all obvious when we hear the Divine Liturgy saying something quite contrary to this arrangement. St. John Chrysostom's Liturgy has this passage:

*It was You Who brought us from non-existence into being, and when we had fallen away You raised us up again, and did not cease to do all things until You had brought us up to heaven, and had endowed us with Your kingdom which is to come.*

The clear meaning of this passage puts being “brought up to heaven” and being “endowed with the Kingdom” in the past tense (past perfect to be more precise). Indeed there is a complete jumble of tenses in the last phrase: had endowed us...Kingdom which is to come. Whaaa?

So God has given us something in the past, which hasn't come yet. Such language is not isolated. It occurs again later in the liturgy:

*Do this in remembrance of Me! Remembering this saving commandment and all those things which have come to pass for us: the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the Sitting at the right hand, and the Second and glorious Coming.*

The Second and glorious Coming is numbered among those things that have come to pass. This is not unique to St. John. He is merely following language that is already found in the New Testament:

*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (Eph 2:4-6); and He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, (Col 1:13)*

Something that seems clearly in the future is spoken of in the past and addressed to us in the present... This is the true character of eschatology—the study of last things.

For one segment of contemporary Christians, eschatology (the study of last things) refers to questions of what will happen at the end of the world. It concerns itself with wars and political figures, the persecution of the Church and such. It places last things in the last place, thereby conforming to the normal world of cause and effect and the flow of time. But this provides no manner for understanding the strange language of St. Paul (or St. John Chrysostom) and actually misses the entire point of the last things.

The first proclamation of Christ (and of John the Baptist) is: “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.” Modern scholars, having lost a proper understanding of eschatology, often misinterpret this as an announcement of an immediate coming of the end of the world in a linear, cause-and-effect manner. They equally think that Jesus was “mistaken” in this and that his followers had to change the message to fit his failure.

And the message is misunderstood as well. For many, the “coming of the Kingdom of God” is made into an ethical event, while others simply give up on the topic and make Jesus’ ministry into something else. For example, the forensic model of the atonement reduces Jesus’ ministry to His blood payment on the Cross. His teachings, healings and wonders become of little importance (again reduced mostly to ethical teachings).

Only the strange world of traditional eschatology sees Christ’s ministry and the whole of His work as a single thing and continually present within our lives at this moment. This strange world is found within the liturgical and sacramental life of Orthodoxy—indeed, it is essential.

The Kingdom of God proclaimed by Christ was not an expectation of a soon-coming political entity. It was the announcement of an immediate presence that was Christ Himself. When St. John the Forerunner sent his disciples to question Jesus, as to whether he were the Messiah, the reply was given in the language of the Kingdom:

*Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. (Luk 7:22)*

It is a reference to the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah:

*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD..*

Christ says what He says and does what He does, because He Himself is the coming of the Kingdom of God. And where the Kingdom is, these things happen. The Kingdom of God is a present-tense manifestation of a future-tense reality (which is actually an eternal reality that forms the future, the telos, of all creation united with God).

This is the very heart of the Divine Liturgy. There we remember something that was itself a present tense manifestation of the Messianic Banquet, rather aptly called the Last Supper. We eat a meal that was an eating of a meal that has not yet been eaten.

Such statements make for very strange reading. But listen to these words spoken quietly by the priest as he breaks Body of Christ in the altar:

*Broken and divided is the Lamb of God: Who is broken, yet not divided; who is eaten, yet never consumed; but sanctifies those who partake thereof.*

The liturgy is filled with such inner contradictions. It is a hallmark of the Orthodox liturgical experience.

The Christian life is an eschatological reality. The life that is ours in Christ “has not yet been revealed” (1Jn. 3:2) and yet it is a present reality. This same character runs throughout all of the sacraments. We are Baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ as into present events. Holy Unction is a manifestation of the Kingdom to come in the same manner of Christ’s miracles, and so forth. This is among the reasons that Orthodoxy is described as “mystical.” It means precisely what it prays.

And this differs profoundly from those who have turned Christianity into a merely “historical” religion. For them, the historical event of Christ’s death and resurrection represents a transaction that has paid for their sins. The time after Christ’s Ascension only marks a period for evangelization and awaiting His Second Coming. Nothing in particular has been made different about the time we live in. Our time is still viewed as linear, marked by cause-and-effect, in no way differing from the time of an unbeliever. True eschatology has no place in such a scheme.

But the proper heart of the Christian life is learning to live in communion with this eschatological reality—to participate now in the life of the Kingdom which is to come. This present tense participation in an eternal reality is how we die to ourselves, how we find a new life, how we enter the Kingdom, how we find the place of the heart, how we overcome the passions, how we eat the heavenly bread, how we trample down death, how we are justified and made holy.

We are living the last things. Ever.

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#### CHRISTIAN CHARITIES OPPORTUNITIES:

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**Ecumenical Food Kitchen:** St John's is responsible for making and serving meals to the homeless at the Trinity Lutheran Church in Coeur d' Alene on the following evenings:

Thursday March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022, Thursday May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Thursday June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**Warming Shelter:** On Saturday evenings from Jan 1 to March 26, 2022, individual families are signing up to bring Pizza or Pasta to the warming shelter in Post Falls.

Contact Jeane Wood if you would like to be included on the schedule. Jeane is offering to deliver the pizzas if that would help anyone. She will keep everyone informed as to the needs of families in the shelter for us to help and pray for them.

*If you are able to help with any of these projects, contact Jeane Wood: text or phone at (208) 660-3046, or email at [plastinowood@gmail.com](mailto:plastinowood@gmail.com)*

### **SCHEDULE OF SERVICES & EVENTS {*Calendar*}**

**Saturday, January 1, Circumcision of our Lord Jesus Christ:** Great Vespers 6pm

**Sunday, January 2:** Orthros & Divine Liturgy 9am

**Wednesday, January 5:** Great Royal Hours & Typica 9am; Vespers Divine Liturgy 3pm

**Thursday, January 6, Theophany:** Festal Orthros & Divine Liturgy 9am; Blessing of the Waters at Gencarella's 2:30pm

**Friday, January 7:** Spiritual Circle 9:30

**Saturday, January 8:** Altar-Server Meeting 4pm; Great Vespers 6pm

**Sunday, January 9:** Orthros & Divine Liturgy 9am

### **LUNCH TEAMS**

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday, January 2: Sarah Plew's team

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday, January 9: Joy Corey's team

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, January 16: Lisa Gencarella's team

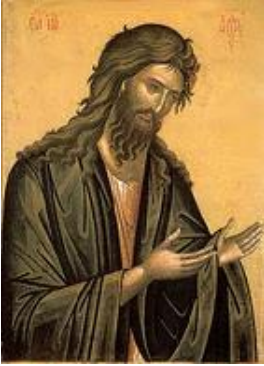
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday, January 23: Riley Chapman's team

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday, January 30: POTLUCK

**PRAYERS FOR THE LIVING:** Cassian & Lane family, Kh. Malvi and all the Neyman and Townsend families, Mark and Michelle Bruto Da Costa, John/Steven Wood, Fr. Jeremiah Vollman, Thao, Gwenn, Lilly & the children & mothers of the Hogar in Guatemala, those suffering with the Covid-19 virus and those caring for the sick and suffering, victims of injustice and social unrest, Metropolitans Paul and John (hostages in Syria), the suffering Christians throughout the Middle East.

**PRAYERS FOR THE DEPARTED:** Fr. Nicholas, Michael, Andrew Mulford, Ernest (Kh. Mona's Father), Victims of abortion, Victims of the Covid-19 virus, Victims of injustice and social unrest, the departed Christians throughout the world who have died for the Faith.

**CONFESSIONS:** Please remember to contact Fr. Mark to schedule confessions, *even* if you intend to confess after the evening services. This ensures that your confession is well prepared, and that everyone can be heard in an orderly fashion. Father is available to meet at the Church Tuesday through Saturday.



### **Troparion of St. John the Baptist**

*The memory of the just is celebrated with hymns of praise, but the Lord's testimony is enough for thee, O Forerunner. For thou wast shown to be more wonderful than the prophets since thou wast granted to baptize Him whom thou didst proclaim. Then having endured great suffering for the truth thou didst rejoice to bring even to those in hades the good tidings, that God who hast appeared in the flesh, takes away the sins of the world, and grants us great mercy.*