

## The Door Opens

Today we celebrate the holy feast of Theophany, the humble but profoundly significant Baptism of our Lord at the hand of St. John the Baptist:

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matthew 13: 13-17).

In the recent feast of our Lord's Nativity, we beheld the first definitive and direct condescending action of God, as promised through revealed prophecy, towards effecting the means to man's salvation. This is the mystical action of Christ's Incarnation, with His birth signifying the stepping through the portal of a virginal womb, assuming man's nature, entering the corrupt world to free it from slavery to evil. His divine Incarnation linked God with man, initiating the process of redemption and cleansing... through man's linkage with Christ. St. Gregory Palamas writes in his Nativity homily:

The very Word of God from God emptied Himself in an indescribable way, came down from on high to the lowest state of man's nature, and indissolubly linked it with Himself, and in humbling Himself and becoming poor like us, He raised on high the things below, or rather, He gathered both things into one, mingling humanity with divinity, and by so doing He taught everyone that humility is the road which leads upwards, setting forth today Himself as an example before men and angels alike.

For the next 30 years, our Saviour was basically protected, cared for and nurtured. When God deemed it fitting, His first "pastoral" act to redeem and rescue mankind is taken today, which the Church celebrates as the feast of Theophany. St. Gregory further writes in another homily:

Water is a means of cleansing, but not for souls. It can remove dirt from those being baptized, but not the same grime that comes from sin. For that reason the Healer of souls, the Father of spirits (Heb. 12:9), Christ, Who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), enters the water before us to be baptized, as we celebrate today. He draws the grace of the all-Holy Spirit from above to dwell in the water with Him, so that later when those being baptized as He was enter the water, He is there, clothing them ineffably with His Spirit, attaching Himself to them, and filling them with the grace that purifies and illumines reasonable spirits. And this is what the divine Paul is referring to: "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27).

What mystically occurs at man's holy, soul-saving baptism, (rendered possible after our Saviour's baptism and His sanctification of the waters which is celebrated today), is the beginning of the means of

man's renewal, "rebirth": Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:5). This effectively begins man's "linkage" (bond) with Christ, which is obligatory for his salvation.. As the Fathers attest, this bond is strengthened through the keeping of the Commandments , by essentially living a selfless "life in Christ", (with the help of the Church, which is His vehicle, His body). The bond is weakened through the drifting into passions and sin, rendering man vulnerable and sick once again. Repentance is the means provided for cleansing, healing and return, culminating in the rejuvenation and re-strengthening of the bond through the mystical partaking of His Body and Blood.

Through this inexplicable action of divine love and mercy, Christ invites man to be cleansed and bound to Him, which opens the door, (closed since the fall), to God's Kingdom. As we read above, "the heavens were opened unto him". If we are bound to Christ, the heavens are opened to us! St. Gregory further writes:

Through Christ the heavens opened to us, and He cleansed us through Himself, for He needed neither cleansing nor the opening of the heavens.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today we are not just celebrating the revelation and manifestation of the Holy Trinity, (which is the meaning of "Theophany"), but we also share in the immense joy and hope that our Saviour provides through the opportunity to eternally bond with Him, with baptism opening the doorway to His Kingdom!

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!