



Assumption of the Virgin Mary Ukrainian Orthodox Church

January 04, 2025 Addendum

The Meaning of the Baptism of Christ Icon. January 6 is celebrated as Theophany in the Eastern Church and Epiphany in the West. Theophany means “Revelation of God,” marking manifestations of God to humanity. In the West, the feast commemorates the Magi visiting Christ. In the East, it encompasses the Nativity, the angels’ revelation to the shepherds, the coming of the Magi, and finally the baptism of Christ at age thirty—the moment when the Holy Trinity is revealed. This icon of the Baptism of Christ, written by Fr. Jon Buffington, serves as a “painted gospel.” Measuring five feet square, it forms the central panel of a baptismal triptych. At the center stand Jesus, St. John the Baptist, and the Holy Spirit descending as a dove. Above them, the hand of God the Father emerges from a dark semicircle symbolizing heaven. Rays from the Father visually express the divine voice: “This is my Son, the Beloved.” The Spirit’s descent completes the Trinitarian revelation. The triangular arrangement of Father, Son, and Spirit is echoed in the mountains, a traditional sign of sacred encounter. The mountains’ part to draw attention to Christ’s baptism, recalling St. John Chrysostom’s teaching that at this moment “the

heavens were opened” for humanity for the first time since the fall. Angels stand as witnesses, and the gold background signifies God’s divine presence. Christ’s cruciform halo bears the Greek letters Ὁ ὢΝ—“He Who Is”—the divine name revealed to Moses. Unlike human baptism, in which we are cleansed, Christ’s baptism sanctifies the waters and all creation. His nudity symbolizes restored, unashamed humanity, contrasting Adam and Eve after the fall. The flowing blue water resembles the divine nimbus often surrounding Christ, and the “water spirits” below personify the Jordan and the sea, echoing Psalm 114:3. John stands on the west (symbolizing the Old Covenant), while angels on the east prepare to clothe Christ (the New Covenant). Christ’s movement from west to east signifies humanity’s passage from the old promise to the new. John is depicted as both ascetic and warrior, clothed in stylized camel hair resembling chainmail. The tree and axe beside him recall his warning that unfruitful trees are cut down. In the upper left, John and Andrew emerge from a dark cave—symbolizing ignorance before revelation—experiencing their first theophany. Every element of the icon teaches the mystery of Christ’s identity and the meaning of baptism. It invites contemplation, calling believers to entrust themselves to God and enter the life Christ opens through His revelation.

The Argo, a merchant ship sailing off the New England coast, ran aground and lost its cargo. It was traveling at night and in dense fog. The captain later explained that the ship was only three degrees off course. Those three degrees eventually meant a difference of ten miles at the point the ship hit ground. The ship's instruments had malfunctioned and in the darkness the captain could not see that he was approaching land.

Our life can be like that. Life is a journey requiring a right course. Our most urgent need is to align ourselves in all that we are and in all that we say and do with God, His will and His purposes, so that we may safely reach the harbor of His Kingdom. To veer from this course only a few degrees can eventually lead to shipwreck on the rocks of selfishness, sin and spiritual death. We cannot travel in the darkness of the world without spiritual sensitivities and without guiding light.

Christ said: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness" (Jn 8:12, p. 260). Christ Himself is God's Light and He always shines upon us to the degree that we are ready to receive Him. As we hear the Good News of Christ and we embrace God's love and forgiveness with all our hearts, we experience something of God's spiritual light shining through Christ. As we affirm our faith in Christ and daily practice His teachings, the new creation takes hold in us. To quote St. Paul: "The God Who said, 'Out of darkness the light shall shine!' is the same God Who made His light shine in our hearts, to bring us the knowledge of God's glory shining in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). This is "the light that comes from the Good News" (2 Cor. 4:4) which keeps us on the right course - helping us to maintain a right relationship with God, ourselves, others and everything in the world.

The last words of Jesus in the above passage call for repentance as the way of preparing to see Christ's light. "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!". True repentance means a deliberate and decisive resolve to change course and to head in a new direction. Repentance is God's offer for a fresh start. How can God forgive us and liberate us from whatever enslaves us unless we turn to Him? How can we experience our new self in Christ unless we are willing to leave the old self behind? That is why Jesus began His ministry by asking people to turn their eyes from themselves and to look toward God and His Kingdom. "Turn away from your sins, because the Kingdom is near!" (Mt. 4:17). THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS ALWAYS NEAR! THE KINGDOM OF

GOD IS GOD HIMSELF IN HIS PERSONAL PRESENCE, GRACIOUS POWER, HEALING FORGIVENESS, AND RENEWING LOVE EXPERIENCED THROUGH CHRIST. That's the Good News!

ORTHODOX NEWS AROUND THE GLOBE



The new Orthodox parish of the Holy Apostles has opened in Sandpoint, Idaho as a result of missionary efforts of Fr. Gregory Horton (Formerly of Holy Trinity in Catasauqua) who now serves in Naples, Idaho. Bishop Maxim appointed Fr. Laurent Cleenewerck as pastor.

Metropolitan Iakovos of Mexico, Central America performed Baptism of 6 adults & 2 children in St. Nicholas Church in Havana, Cuba.

Archbishop Ambrose of Korea led the patronal feast day services at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Seoul, South Korea.



The Church of Holy Theophany, Colorado Springs, experiencing explosive growth with 160 new baptisms the past 2 years, currently has nearly 100 catechumens and is opening new mission parishes in Colorado.

The Divine Liturgy was celebrated for the first time in 1700 years in the ancient church site in Aqaba, Jordan by Archbishop Christophoros.

Scottish priest Fr. Gabriel McBeth, of Archangel Church in Glasgow, has been consecrated the first Orthodox bishop for Western Europe since the Great Schism in 1054 at St. Alexander's Cathedral in Paris.

The Orthodox Brotherhood of Youth in Poland distributed 1,400 food packages to needy families in Podlasiye Province.



After the end of persecution and destruction by the Communists, the Orthodox Church of Albania has been restored so that church bells rang out in more than 450 churches now opened such as this Cathedral of the Resurrection in Tirana.