

ST BASIL GREEK MELKITE CATHOLIC CHURCH
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NATIVITY- THEOPHANY

The historical approach to the feast of Theophany: The oldest practice documented in Christian history is that of a single celebration of Christ's birth, the adoration of the Magi, all the events of Christ's childhood recorded in the Scriptures, as well as His baptism by John in the Jordan and His first miracle, at the wedding feast of Cana. St Cyril of Alexandria writes about it at the beginning of the third century. In the next century, St Gregory the Theologian, writing in the year 380, refers to this practice, still observed in his Church in Asia Minor: "Now if the Feast of the Theophany, and so also of the Nativity, for it is called both, since two names are ascribed to one reality... The name is Theophany, since He has appeared, and Nativity, since He has been born" (Oration 38, *On the Theophany or the Nativity of Christ*, 3).

Scholars today believe that a single feast of the Manifestation of God was observed in the West as well, but on December 25. In both cases, the date was determined by the date believed to be the date of the crucifixion. In the ancient world it was commonly believed that the date of a truly great person's death coincided with the date of his conception or birth. Some rabbis still teach that a righteous person is entrusted with a mission on the day of his conception or birth. In one who completes his mission in the most perfect way possible, this perfection is expressed in the fact that his mission ends on the same day that it was begun.

The Theological meaning of the Theophany: The original single feast of the Nativity-Theophany celebrated the first revelations of His divinity, His incarnation and the beginning of His ministry as Lord and Savior of mankind. It put forth a number of themes which we now find spread out throughout the festal season.

On the feast of the Nativity (and of Christ's circumcision on January 1) we celebrate God becoming man in a particular place and time. Jesus is born in the heart of God's chosen people, Israel, and He is adored by them in Mary and Joseph and the shepherds who came to the cave. These feasts celebrate the particular revelation of God to the nation of Israel in terms of its sacred history, as we proclaim in this verse from vespers: "Rejoice, O Jerusalem, and celebrate, all you lovers of Zion; for the temporal bonds with which Adam was condemned have been loosed; Paradise has been opened for us and the serpent has been annihilated, having beheld now that the one deceived by her of old has become a mother to the Creator. O, the depth, riches, wisdom and knowledge of God: that the instrument of death which brought death to all flesh, has become the first-fruit of salvation to all the world because of the Theotokos. The all-perfect God has been born from her as a babe; and by His birth He has sealed her virginity; by His swaddling-clothes He has loosed the chains of our sins; and by His babyhood He has healed the pains and sorrows of Eve. Let all creation, therefore, exchange glad tidings and rejoice; for Christ has come to recall it and to save our souls."

Manifestation to the Gentiles: Our vision of Christ's coming work is widened as the Magi, pagan astrologers, arrive "from the East" to worship Him. The gifts they bring represent kingship (gold), priesthood (frankincense) and a self-emptying death (myrrh). In them Christ's kingship over all nations is revealed. He is to be "*a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel*" (Lk 2:32).

"You have shone forth from the Virgin, O Christ, super-sensual Sun of righteousness. And a star pointed to You O uncontainable One contained in a cave, and the Magi were led to worship You. Wherefore, with them we magnify You. O Giver of life, glory to You!"

Manifestation to All Creation: On the feast of the Theophany, another aspect of Christ's incarnation is celebrated. His coming transforms, not only humanity, but all creation. In His baptism, He sanctifies the waters, a primordial element of creation according to Genesis, representing the ultimate transfiguration of all things in the Kingdom of God. As we hear at the great blessing of water on the feast of the Theophany, "Today land and sea divide between them the joy of the world, and the world is filled with rejoicing. The waters behold You, O Lord; the waters behold You and they fear. The Jordan turns back its course, and the mountains shout with glee as they behold God in the flesh." "Of old the prince of this world was named king of all that was in the waters; but by Your baptism he is choked and destroyed, like Legion in the lake. With Your mighty arm, O Savior, You have granted freedom to Your creation, which he had enslaved" (Canon at Compline on the Fore-feast of the Theophany). (*JanLeaflets2020*)

THE THEOPHANY OF THE LORD

Saturday January, 4 & Sunday, January 5, 2020

WEEKLY SERVICES

Daily Liturgy: Monday-Friday at 8:30AM **Holy Confession:** Every Monday at 4-6PM
Holy Liturgy: Saturday at 4:30PM, Sunday at 11:00AM **Vespers:** Every Saturday at 3:00PM
Matins/Orthos: Every Sunday at 9:00AM **Holy Rosary:** Every Sunday at 10:30AM

SPEEDY RECOVERY

Please continue to pray for our convalescing friends, including Archdeacon George Yany, Joseph Nassimos, Wael and his son Jordan Barahmeh, Michael Klockowski, Eugene Hutchinson, Maggy Atallah, Nancy Gazzal, Rose Pawlinga, Jean Benoit and Fouad Marji. Please notify Fr. Shofany in case of illness.

WEEKLY OFFERINGS: THANK YOU!

New Year Collection. Dec 31/ Jan 1, 2020: \$ 185.00

Fuel Donation: \$ 50.00

† MEMORIAL MASSES †

THIS SATURDAY, JANUARY 4

† **Philip Rahal**, By Jeanette Raya Farewege

THIS SUNDAY, JANUARY 5

† **Salwa Atallah- Hamati**, By Gloria Shaheen

† **Rose Reesh**, 5th Memorial Anniversary, By her Family

NEXT SATURDAY, JANUARY 11

† **Philip Rahal**, By Larry & Rose Pawlinga

NEXT SUNDAY, JANUARY 12

† **Salwa Atallah- Hamati**, By Gloria Shaheen