

■ On the Holy Theophany of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ

“By Descending Into the Water, We Ascend to God”*

*Holy Hierarchs; Reverend Fathers; Venerable Choir of Monastics;
Beloved Brethren in Christ and Children in the Lord:*

TODAY, on this glorious and light-filled Feast of Holy Theophany, the sacred assembly of the Orthodox exclaims with joy and enthusiasm, together with the Holy Patriarch Sophronios of Jerusalem:

We glorify Thee, O Only-Begotten Son of God, born without father from Thy Mother, and without mother from Thy Father. In the preceding Feast [of the Nativity] we beheld Thee as an infant, while in the present Feast we behold Thee full-grown, our God made manifest, perfect God from perfect God¹



Leaving behind the lowly Cave and the Manger of Bethlehem, with fervor of soul we follow the Angelic Powers as they go on before us to the streams of the Jordan,² in order to behold a great and awesome Mystery:

Our Lord, after thirty years of humble labor and obedience that remained hidden and inconspicuous, came from Nazareth in Galilee in a simple and lowly guise to the River Jordan, and He Who is “above all purity”³ asked for the Baptism of repentance. And although, as God, He has sovereignty over the universe, He bears the image of a servant and comes in bodily form to His servant, St. John the Forerunner, so that by deifying Baptism He might free us from dreadful slavery to the enemy!⁴

He strips naked voluntarily, in order to clothe us in our primal raiment. He bows His head, on which the Baptist lays his hand, and is immersed in the water, not in order that He, the Sinless One, might purify Himself, but in order to submerge our old man therein. He accepts the sins of the whole world and buries them within the river, in order to raise up the new man, “created after God,”⁵ to sanctify the waters and to renew all of creation.

Our Lord humbled Himself beyond measure and was glorified Divinely: the Father bore witness to His Beloved Son and the Spirit, in the form of a dove, showed Him to be equal to Him in Divinity. Thus, men were reconciled with God the Father and became capable of receiving the Holy Spirit. The Heavens, closed on account of the transgression of our forefather, are opened and cleaved for our sake; and keeping their gates opened from now on, they await our entrance.⁶

Our ascent to God is accomplished “through our descent.”³ We are reborn through the descent of Holy Baptism; but in addition, through the descent of humility and repentance we drown the pride, the disobedience, the egotism, and all the uncleanness of the old man; and in this way we are purified, illumined, glorified, and deified!

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Beloved Children in the Lord:

We live in an arrogant and capricious world, in which there is an insatiable desire for domination, control, and every kind of self-aggrandizement. Talk of humility and repentance seems absurd and worthy of derision and rejection, since it is equated with an attitude of servility and cowardice. Men deify themselves and fall into worse delusion and foolishness than the first-fashioned human beings, for they are ready to destroy both the creation and themselves.

But when, even in the realm of the Church, a worldly mentality and worldly behavior become alarmingly evident, then we have an adulteration of the Gospel and the luminous vision of our hope of salvation is darkened. If we lose the “majesty” and “hidden power” of humility,⁷ which is our glory and beauty, then we exclude ourselves from a sacred and Divine ascent and become extinguished lamps and salt without savor,⁸ fit to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men!

Our Lord, the living and true Humility and Glory, gives us the golden rule of the Gospel: *“But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant; and whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”*⁹

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Beloved Gathering in Christ:

Our Holy Synod, carrying on her lawful and God-pleasing resistance against the panheresy of ecumenism and the calendar innovation, will not cease to struggle and confess, in deed and word, “the good profession”¹⁰ of Faith and Life in Christ, exhorting her beloved children and the entire world to persevere in what has been handed down to us by the Holy Apostles, Martyrs, Fathers and Mothers of our Faith, and this in repentance, humility, and love.

May the blessing of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit be richly bestowed this year on our most beloved Fatherland and may it inspire

our leaders to uphold all that is just and dear to God. Amen!

* Delivered on 6 January 2003 (Old Style) by His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili, at the celebration of Holy Theophany in Oropos, Attika.

Notes

1. “Preface” to the Great Blessing of the Waters on Theophany.
2. See the Forefeast of Theophany, first *Sticheron* at the Praises, January 2.
3. *Stichera* at the Praises of Theophany.
4. See the first *Troparion* of the first ode of the Prefestal Canon, Orthros, January 4.
5. Ephesians 4:24.
6. St. Gregory Palamas, Homily 60, “Delivered on the Holy Feast of Lights,” §14.
7. St. Isaac the Syrian, *Τὰ Εὐοθέητα Ἀσκητικά* [*Extant Works*], Discourse 20, “Concerning the Great Value of Humility.”
8. See St. Mark 9:50; St. Matthew 5:13.
9. St. Matthew 23:12.
10. I St. Timothy 6:12.