

EPIPHANY
FEAST DAY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST
JOHN'S BAPTISM IN PERSPECTIVE
JOHN'S BAPTISM OF JESUS
THE BLESSING OF THE WATERS
BAPTISM SAVES US

January 6, 2010
Revision D

GOSPELS:		
Epiphany	January 6	Matthew 3:13-17
Feast of John	January 7	John 1:29-34
EPISTLES:		
Epiphany	January 6	Titus 2:11-14, 3:4-7
Feast of John	January 7	Acts 19:1-8

Epiphany is celebrated on January 6th and the Feast Day of John the Baptist is celebrated on January 7th. Since the Scripture readings for these two occasions are overlapping and intertwining, we will consider them together. In addition, the Sunday before Epiphany covers a brief history of the life of John the Baptist. In addition, See Appendix for more detailed studies of the life of John the Baptist.

The Eastern and Western Churches both celebrate Epiphany early in January. The Western Church commemorates the visit by the Wise Men on Epiphany and the Lord's baptism on the Sunday after Epiphany. An alternate reading for Epiphany in some Western Churches, however, is the Lord's baptism per today's Gospel Lesson. The Eastern church commemorates the visit by the Wise Men on Christmas Day and the Lord's baptism on Epiphany. In addition, the Eastern Church also celebrates the blessing of the waters of baptism on Epiphany.

In the West, the Matthew 3 and Acts 19 passages are also the chosen readings for the Lord's baptism on the Sunday after Epiphany, with the John 1 passage used for the Second Sunday after Epiphany. The passage from Titus is used in the West for either Christmas Day or the 23rd Sunday after Pentecost.

The English word Epiphany comes from the Greek word *epiphaneia*, meaning appearance, and relates specifically to the appearance of the Lord, both in the flesh (2 Timothy 1:10) and at the end of time (2 Thessalonians 2:8; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13). In today's Gospel and Epistle lessons, we look at the Lord's Epiphany at His baptism, but also look beyond that to His Epiphany at the end of time.

The Feast of the Epiphany originated in the Eastern Church and was introduced to the West in the 4th Century. In its early usage, it ranked with Easter and Pentecost as one of the three principal festivals of the Church. The central focus of Epiphany has always been the Lord's baptism. But, in some places (even to this day), the festival includes the Nativity also. When Epiphany was introduced to the West, its theme changed in the West from the Lord's Epiphany at baptism to the Epiphany of the Lord to the Gentiles at the Magi's visit (Cross, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 465).

Epiphany Eve, like Christmas Eve, follows "Royal Hours", so called because we are awaiting the appearance of the King. This includes prayer services throughout the day using the readings shown in the Table. "Royal Hours" are also observed in the Orthodox Church for Good Friday. The pattern for each of the "Hours" uses three Psalms, one reading from the Prophets, an Epistle, and a Gospel lesson. For each of the "Hours", there is one Psalm that is repeated from Christmas Eve to Epiphany Eve to Good Friday.

ROYAL HOURS READINGS

	EPIPHANY EVE	CHRISTMAS EVE	GOOD FRIDAY
1st Hour: 6:00 a.m.	Psalm 5	Psalm 5	Psalm 5
	Psalm 23	Psalm 45	Psalm 2
	Psalm 27	Psalm 46	Psalm 22
	Isaiah 35:1-10	Micah 5:2-4	Zachariah 11:10-13
	Acts 13:25-33	Hebrews 1:1-12	Galatians 6:14-18
	Matthew 3:1-6	Matthew 1:18-25	Matthew 27:1-56
3rd Hour: 9:00 a.m.	Psalm 29	Psalm 67	Psalm 35
	Psalm 42	Psalm 87	Psalm 109
	Psalm 51	Psalm 51	Psalm 51
	Isaiah 1:16-20	Baruch 3:36-4:4	Isaiah 50:4-11
	Acts 19:1-8	Galatians 3:23-4:4	Romans 5:6-10
	Mark 1:1-8	Luke 2:1-20	Mark 15:16-41
6th Hour: 12:00 p.m.	Psalm 74	Psalm 72	Psalm 54
	Psalm 77	Psalm 132	Psalm 140
	Psalm 91	Psalm 91	Psalm 91
	Isaiah 12:3-6	Isaiah 7:10-16; 8:1-4,9,10	Isaiah 52:13-54:1
	Romans 6:3-11	Hebrews 1:10-2:3	Hebrews 2:11-18
	Mark 1:9-11	Matthew 2:1-12	Luke 23:32-49
9th Hour: 3:00 p.m.	Psalm 93	Psalm 110	Psalm 69
	Psalm 114	Psalm 111	Psalm 70
	Psalm 86	Psalm 86	Psalm 86
	Isaiah 49:8-15	Isaiah 9:6-7	Jer. 11:18-12:5, 9-10, 14-15
	Titus 2:11-15; 3:4-7	Hebrews 2:11-18	Hebrews 10:19-31
	Luke 3:1-18	Matthew 2:13-23	John 19:23-37
Vespers: 6:00 p.m.	Genesis 1:1-13	Genesis 1:1-13	Exodus 33:11-23
	2 Kings 2:6-14	Isaiah 9:6-7	Job 42:12-17
	2 Kings 2:19-22	Is. 7:10-16; 8:1-4, 9, 10	Isaiah 52:13-54:1
	1 Cor. 9:19-27	Hebrews 1:1-12	Hebrews 2:11-18
	Luke 3:1-18	Luke 2:1-20	Luke 23:32-49

JOHN'S BAPTISM IN PERSPECTIVE

**January 6, 2010
Revision D**

EPISTLE LESSON: Acts 18:23-19:8

Five different baptisms are mentioned in the Scriptures and a sixth is suggested also by Gregory of Nazianzus:

The Baptism of Moses

Paul writes “that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea; all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1-2). When Pharaoh overtook Israel in the wilderness, Israel was virtually helpless. Pharaoh had 600 select chariots leading the charge (Exodus 14:6-9), plus 50,000 cavalry and 200,000 footsoldiers (Josephus, *Antiquities*, II, xv, 3). Israel wailed to Moses, “Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness!” (Exodus 14:11-12).

So Moses stretched out his hand and lifted up his staff; and the Red Sea was divided for Israel to cross on dry land (Exodus 14:16, 21-22). Meanwhile the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them to behind them -- and they passed through the cloud (Exodus 14:16). This pillar was the Lord Himself (Exodus 13:21) and was a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. It gave off enough light that several million people could travel 24 hours per day along with their flocks and herds (Exodus 13:21-22). As the Egyptians tried to go through the cloud, they were brought into confusion, their chariot wheels began to swerve and they drove with difficulty. The Egyptians even said that the Lord was fighting for Israel and against them (Exodus 14:24-25). While baptism in the cloud and the sea proved to be death and destruction for the Egyptians, it proved to be a passage from death to resurrection for Israel.

The Baptism of John

John the Baptist was referred to by the Lord as the greatest of the Old Testament Prophets (Luke 7:28). As such, he came in the spirit and power of Elijah to “restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers lest I come and smite the land with a curse” (Malachi 4:5, Luke 1:17). In this context, “fathers” implies forefathers and “children” implies descendants, thus bringing the Faith back to what it was as received by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

John preached a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Luke 3:3). All the Old Testament Prophets also issued calls for repentance. But their calls for repentance focused people back to the Old Testament rituals where remission of sins was by blood sacrifice, not by

water (Leviticus 4:20, Deuteronomy 21:8). Old Testament purification rites required those who offered sacrifices to wash in clean water beforehand; but water just cleaned up the offerer to qualify him to offer the sacrifice (Exodus 29:4, Leviticus 8:6, Exodus 19:10-15, Exodus 30:18-21).

Jesus later spoke about how true worshipers must worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). With the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD, people then had no alternative. John alluded to this also when he said that, even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Luke 3:8-9). In iconography, John is pictured as having wings like an angel. This is a reference to Malachi 3:1 (quoted in Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, Luke 7:27): “Behold, I am going to send my messenger (literally an angel), and he will clear the way before Me”.

In the Epistle lesson, Luke tells us about Apollos and twelve others in and around Ephesus that were “fervent in spirit” and who taught accurately the things of the Lord even though they knew only the baptism of John (Acts 18:24, 25; 19:1-3). This occurred at the beginning of Paul’s Third Missionary Journey, or about 53 AD (25 years after the death of John). According to tradition (N. Velimirovic, Prologue, Sept. 10), Apollos of Alexandria had been a member of the Seventy that Jesus sent out two by two to heal the sick and cast out demons (Luke 10:1-20). He had been instructed in the way of the Lord (by John) and was an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures (Acts 18:24-25).

After he spoke boldly in the synagogue, Aquila and Priscilla (also of the Seventy) “took him aside and explained the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26). Similarly with the other twelve; they hadn’t heard that there is a Holy Spirit (Acts 19:2). Apollos and his twelve co-workers had apparently been out of town at Pentecost and had missed the giving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4, 38)!!

Thus, the baptism of John was incomplete. In Paul’s words: “John baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him; that is, on Christ Jesus (Acts 19:4). John said the same thing: “I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16).

Hippolytus, referring to John’s statement, “I am not the Christ” (John 1:20) said that John was saying: “I am the servant, and not the Lord; I am the subject, and not the King; I am the sheep, and not the shepherd; I am a man, and not God. By my birth I loosed the barrenness of my mother; I did not make virginity a mother. I was brought up from beneath; I did not come down from above. I bound the tongue of my father; (Luke 1:20). I did not unfold divine grace. I was known by my mother, and I was not announced by a star (Matthew 2:9). I am worthless, and the least; but “after me there comes One who is before Me” (John 1:27). He is after me, indeed, in time, but before me by reason of the inaccessible and unutterable light of divinity. “There comes One mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matthew 3:2). I am subject to authority, but He has authority in Himself. I am bound by sins, but He is the Remover of sins. I apply the Law, but He bring grace to light. I teach as a slave, but He judge as the Master. I have the earth as my couch, but He possesses heaven. I baptize with the baptism of repentance, but He confers the gift of

adoption: Why do you give attention to me? I am not the Christ” (Discourse on the Theophany, 3).

The Baptism of Jesus

The baptism of Jesus began very much like the baptism of John; and both Jesus and John were baptizing at the same time (John 3:22-23). Some of John’s disciples were concerned that Jesus was baptizing more people than John (John 3:25-26, 4:1-2). John considered himself “the friend of the bridegroom who rejoices because of the bridegroom’s voice” (v.29). “He must increase, but I must decrease” (v.30).

John testified of Jesus: “He who comes from heaven is above all. He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure” (vv.31-34). John said this following his baptism of Jesus after having seen heaven opened, having seen the Spirit descend as a dove and having heard the Father’s voice (Matthew 3:16-17).

These early baptisms that Jesus performed, or rather that Jesus’ disciples performed (John 4:1-2), were different than baptisms that the same disciples performed after Pentecost. The difference being that the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:39). After Pentecost, when the 3,000 were converted as a result of Peter’s preaching, they were baptized and received the gift of the Holy Spirit with the baptism (Acts 2:38-41). The Epistle from Titus has more on this aspect of baptism (q.v.).

The Baptism of Martyrdom and Blood

As Jesus was heading for Jerusalem in 30 AD knowing He would be crucified soon, James and John asked if He would grant that they might sit at His right and left in His Glory (Mark 10:37). Their mother, Salome, the wife of Zebedee and the daughter of Joseph, was Jesus’ step-sister and was a close confidante of Jesus’ mother, Mary. It seems that Salome had something to do with this request (Matthew 20:20) but James and John were rather fervent in spirit themselves (Luke 9:54, Mark 3:17).

Jesus’ reply to James and John was that they didn’t know what they were asking: “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” They said they were able, and Jesus said indeed they would. But the place at His right and left was already reserved (Mark 10:38-40).

James’ baptism occurred in about 44 AD after he returned to Jerusalem from Spain (N. Velimirovic, Prologue, April 30). After a long battle with the Jewish leaders and one of their hired magicians, James was denounced to Herod and beheaded (Acts 12:2).

John did not die a martyr’s death, but lived to be over 90 years old. However, he had to endure tortures that were usually fatal. Emperor Domitian forced John to drink a cup of strong poison; that had no effect, so he boiled John in oil. When that had no effect either, he presumed John was immortal and exiled him to the Island of Patmos, about 50 miles off the Coast of Ephesus. Patmos was a prison colony and had more than its fair share of demons, sorcerers and idols. John was beaten many times and left for dead at least once. So while John may not have

died a martyr's death he had many martyr-like experiences including being "baptized" in his own blood.

This type of baptism is not for everyone; only for those that are able -- like James and John. There are times and seasons where the righteous are called to do this. At the writing of the Epistle to the Hebrews, they had "not yet resisted to the shedding of blood in striving against sin" (Hebrews 12:4). Those that do have this honor seem to have a special place in God's economy. Near the end of time, the martyrs are seen as asking the Lord how long until He judges and avenges their blood. They are given a white robe and told to rest a little while longer until the rest of the martyrdom of the saints was completed (Revelation 6:9-11).

The Baptism of Fire

This has two possible meanings: one being the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; the other being the earth's destruction by fire at the end of time. The fire of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost will be covered in more detail at Pentecost (q.v.). The second Baptism of Fire is not called a baptism per se in the Scripture, but it is something everyone needs to pass through just like they had to pass through the Baptism of Moses; so it is rightly called a baptism just as the Red Sea was called a baptism.

Peter wrote that by the Word of God the heavens and the earth were created out of water; then they were destroyed by water during the Flood of Noah. The heavens and earth are now preserved by the same Word, being reserved for fire on Judgment Day (2 Peter 3:5-7).

The Minor Prophets speak of this also. Micah wrote of the Lord's return: the mountains will melt under Him like wax before a fire (Micah 1:4, 7). Zephaniah wrote "all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy and zeal" (Zephaniah 1:18, 3:8). Nahum, speaking of Nineveh, wrote that the mountains quake and the hills dissolve as His wrath is poured out like fire (Nahum 1:5-6).

The Psalms also address the Lord's return with fire: "the Gentiles made an uproar; the kingdoms tottered. He raised His voice; the earth melted" (Psalm 46:6). And also: "fire goes before Him. The mountains melted like wax at the presence of the Lord" (Psalm 97:3, 5).

Paul refers to the saints "being saved, yet so as through fire", where "the day of the Lord will declare and reveal by fire each one's work of what sort it is". Gold, silver, precious stones will survive the fire; wood, hay, straw will be burned (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

All of the above is a mystery that we are not given a lot of information about. We need to trust the Grace of God in these things.

The Baptism of Tears

Some of the Church Fathers also speak of something called a baptism of tears. This term is not found in the Scriptures but there are examples of people who experienced this in the Scriptures. Perhaps the best known example is the story of the woman who was a sinner, who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and with fragrant oil and who wiped His feet with her hair

(Luke 7:36-40). This took place in Capernaum in 28 AD; two years later, Mary of Bethany did something similar just before Jesus' crucifixion (Matthew 26:6-12, Mark 14:3-9, John 12:1-8).

One striking characteristic about the events from Luke 7 is that the woman loved much because she was forgiven much (Luke 7:41-47). Jesus made a big deal about this to the Pharisees who invited Him to dinner -- she loved more than they because she was forgiven more than they (Luke 7:41, 42, 47). The text from Luke 7 is used as the Gospel lesson on days commemorating Holy Nuns from the idea that they, like the woman in Luke 7, loved much.

David wept over his condition a great deal. He described his bed as being drenched in his tears (Psalm 6:6) and how tears had been his food day and night (Psalm 42:3), while King Saul was hunting him down like an animal. King Hezekiah also shed tears of repentance and petition on his death bed -- which the Lord answered immediately (2 Kings 20:1-6). Paul (Acts 20:31) and Timothy (2 Timothy 1:4) are described as expending a lot of tears also.

Tears in our culture are considered unmanly in men and a weakness in women. In the ancient Near East, however, many people kept tear bottles¹ in which they stored all the tears they shed their whole lives (Psalm 56:8).

Some of the Psalms that are read for 3rd, 6th and 9th Hour Prayers give additional insight into Baptism. These Psalms can be summarized as follows:

Psalm 42	Hope During Persecution
Psalm 74	A Prayer During Oppression
Psalm 77	A Challenge from the Gates of Hell
Psalm 114	Creation Responds to God

These Psalms are covered in more detail in Appendix I.

¹ G. Christian Weiss, Insight into Bible Times and Customs, Good News Broadcasting Association, Lincoln NE, 1972, p. 90.

JOHN'S BAPTISM OF JESUS

**January 6, 2009
Revision D**

GOSPEL LESSONS: Matthew 3:13-17, John 1:29-34

If the Baptism of John was incomplete and intended just to prepare the way for the Messiah as John said (Matthew 3:11-12), why did Jesus need to be baptized at all by John? John actually tried to prevent Jesus from baptism saying that he needed to be baptized by Jesus, not vice versa (Matthew 3:14). Jesus stated: "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). So John allowed Him to be baptized and the Uncreated accepted the laying on of hands by His own creation.

Hippolytus commented on this as follows: "As John said that he was not the Christ to the multitude, and as the people watched in eager expectation of seeing some strange spectacle with their bodily eyes, and the devil was struck with amazement at such a testimony from John, lo, the Lord appeared, plain, solitary, poorly clothed, without escort, having on Him the body of man like a garment, and hiding the dignity of the Divinity, that He may elude the snares of the dragon. And not only did He approach John as Lord without royal retinue; but even like a mere man, and one involved in sin, He bent His head to be baptized by John. Wherefore John, on seeing so great a humbling of Himself, was struck with astonishment at the affair, and began to prevent Him, saying, as you have just heard, 'I have need to be baptized of You, and do You come to me?' What are You doing, O Lord? You teach things not according to custom. I have preached one thing (regarding You), and You perform another; the devil has heard one thing, and perceives another. Baptize me with the fire of Divinity; why do You wait for water? Enlighten me with the Spirit; why do You attend upon a creature? Baptize me, the Baptist, that Your preeminence may be known. I, O Lord, baptize with the baptism of repentance, and I cannot baptize those who come to me unless they first confess fully their sins. Be it so then that I baptize You, what have You to confess? You are the Remover of sins, and will You be baptized with the baptism of repentance? Though I should venture to baptize You, the Jordan dares not to come near You. 'I have need to be baptized of You, and do You come to me?' "

And what did the Lord say to him? "Permit it to be so now, for thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Permit it to be so now, John; you are not wiser than I. You see as man; I foreknow as God. It becomes me to do this first, and thus to teach. I engage in nothing unbecoming, for I am invested with honor. Do you marvel, O John, that I am not come in my dignity? The purple robe of kings suits not one in private station, but military splendor suits a king: am I come to a prince, and not to a friend? I am the Fulfiller of the law; I seek to leave nothing wanting to its whole fulfillment, that so after me Paul may exclaim, 'Christ is the fulfilling of the law for righteousness to every one that believes' (Romans 10:4). Baptize Me, John in order that no one may despise baptism. I am baptized by you, the servant, that no one among kings or dignitaries may scorn to be baptized by the hand of a poor priest. Permit Me to go down into the Jordan, in order that they may hear my Father's testimony, and recognize the power of the Son (Discourse on the Theophany, 4, 5).

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The Gospel reading from John 1 gives us more details of this encounter. As Jesus was coming toward John to be baptized, Jesus' identity was revealed to John and John stated:

“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who ranks higher than I, for He was before me.’ I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I come baptizing with water” (John 1:29-31). John also stated: “He who sent me to baptize with water said to me: ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit’ “ (John 1:33). The Baptism of the Holy Spirit was something important to John, because John had been filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15). John realized that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Luke 3:16, Matthew 3:11); this occurred on Pentecost, 30 AD (Acts 2:1-4).

As Jesus came up from the water of the Jordan River, what had been revealed to John about Jesus was confirmed. The heavens were opened; the Spirit of God descended like a dove and alighted on Him; and the Father’s voice came from heaven saying: “This is My Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16-17). Thus the Son of God was revealed to all humanity and made His appearance or Epiphany. In the Eastern Church this is also called Theophany (instead of Epiphany) meaning a manifestation of God.

But what did this manifestation of God mean in terms of “fulfilling all righteousness”? Jesus said later that “He came not to destroy the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). Also, “till heaven and earth pass away nothing will pass from the Law till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18). Jesus also defined the gist of the Law as being summarized in the Greatest Commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:29-34). Jesus quantified this love for neighbors as a sacrificial love just like His love for man: “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another: **as I have love you, that you also love one another**” (John 13:34). By loving one another like this, true righteousness is generated.

James, the Lord’s brother, wrote that loving one’s neighbor fulfilled the royal Law according to the Scripture (James 2:8). Paul wrote that the Law is a tutor to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24) and that Christ is the end of the Law for all who believe (Romans 10:4) because His Law is written on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33). By bearing one another’s burdens, we fulfill the Law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

Another aspect of fulfilling all righteousness involved Jesus’ offering up Himself as the spotless Lamb of God (Hebrews 9:14, 1 Peter 1:19). He needed to keep the Law perfectly in order to do this, and thus He observed all the requirements of the Law (Luke 2:39, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 John 3:5, Hebrews 4:15) including aspects of the Law that weren’t necessary but which may offend some (Matthew 17:24-27). As a result of all this, the Church is able to be holy and spotless as the Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:27, Colossians 1:22, 1 Timothy 6:14).

Jesus did not need to be baptized by John; John recognized this. But Jesus’ purpose in becoming incarnate of the Virgin Mary and in His whole 33 years was to redeem a fallen creation. The Orthodox Study Bible footnote to Matthew 3:15 says it very well: “Jesus did not need purification. But by making the purification of humanity His own, He would wash away the sin of humanity, grant regeneration, and reveal the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Thus, His baptism was necessary for the fulfillment of all God’s righteousness. Gregory of Nyssa says: ‘Jesus enters the filthy (i.e. sinful) waters of the world and when He comes out, brings up (i.e.

purifies) the entire world with Him. ‘ ‘ If the Master, the Uncreated Son of God can be baptized to fulfill all righteousness, how much more can we walk in newness of life.

Some of the Psalms that are read for the Prayers of the Hours give additional insight into what was going on when Christ came to John to be baptized. These Psalms can be summarized as follows:

Psalm 5	Prayers of the Hours
Psalm 23	Christ the Good Shepherd
Psalm 27	The Song of the Newly Baptized
Psalm 29	The Kingdom of God in Glory
Psalm 51	Repentance
Psalm 86	The Poor and Downtrodden
Psalm 91	Christ's Relationship with His Father
Psalm 93	The Lord Rules Creation

These Psalms are covered in more detail in Appendix II.

THE BLESSING OF THE WATERS

**January 6, 2010
Revision D**

Included in the early celebrations of Epiphany in the Eastern Church was a sanctification or blessing of the waters of baptism. When Epiphany was introduced to the Western Church in the 4th Century, this aspect of the festival did not transfer. To this day, the Blessing of the Waters remains an Eastern Church custom only.

During the various readings for Royal Hours, extensive readings from the Old and New Testaments are prescribed as dealing with water, its uses and its significance. Generally, the references to water fall into three categories:

- Waters are subject to the Will and Power of God
- Waters can be healed
- The use of waters in eternity and in the Church

In the Scripture readings that follow, one can see why water as a prime element of creation (Genesis 1:1) can be blessed for a special purpose.

WATER AND THE WILL OF GOD

The Creation: (Vespers, Genesis 1:1-13) The earth was formless and void; darkness covered the surface of the waters. For “darkness” here, one can read forces of darkness per John 1:1-10. First Day: light was separated from the darkness that was over the waters. Second Day: the waters were separated into those above the horizon and those below the horizon. [Included here is water vapor, seas and underground aquifers per Genesis 2:6.] Third Day: the waters were gathered into one place so that dry land could appear.

Israel Crosses the Jordan: (Vespers, Joshua 3:7-17) As the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant began to cross the Jordan River and begin the conquest of Canaan, the waters were cut-off and stood in a heap allowing the nation of Israel to cross on dry land opposite Jericho.

Elijah and Elisha Cross the Jordan: (Vespers, 2 Kings 2:6-14) First Elijah struck the waters of the Jordan opposite Jericho; the waters were divided so that they crossed on dry land. On the East Bank of the Jordan, Elijah was taken up into heaven. Elisha returned to the Jordan, struck it again, and crossed back on dry land.

Moses Leads Israel Across the Red Sea: (Vespers, Exodus 14:15-29) Moses lifted up his staff and stretched out his hand over the sea and divided it; the waters were a wall to them on their right and left as they crossed on dry land. As Pharaoh’s army followed them on the sea bottom, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the waters returned to drown Pharaoh’s army (Exodus 14:15-29, 1 Corinthians 10:1-4. Moses himself received the name “Moses” because he was drawn from the waters of the Nile as an infant by Pharaoh’s daughter (Exodus 2:5-10).

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Gideon's Sheepskin: (Vespers, Judges 6:36-40) Before going to battle, Gideon (one of the Judges) asked the Lord for confirmation that what he was about to do was the Lord's will. On successive evenings, he laid a sheepskin on the flat ground of the threshing floor and asked the Lord that if this plan was His will that the sheepskin be wet the first night but the ground dry. In the morning the ground was dry but he wrung out a bowl of water from the sheepskin. The next night, the sheepskin was dry but the ground was soaking wet (Judges 6:36-40, Hebrews 11:32).

Elijah Versus the Prophets of Baal: (Vespers, 1 Kings 18:30-39) Elijah challenged the people to let him and the 450 prophets of Baal have a cook-off: let each prepare a sacrifice and see whose God answers by fire. After the prophets of Baal had been doing their rituals all day long, with no answer, Elijah prepared the evening continual burnt offering to the Lord. But he added one thing: three times he had four waterpots filled with water poured on top of the offering and the wood such that everything was drenched and the trench² he dug around the altar was filled. Then Elijah prayed and the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones of the altar, the dirt under the altar and even licked up the water in the trench.

WATERS CAN BE HEALED

Moses Heals the Waters of Marah: Vespers, Exodus 15:22-16:1) Immediately after the victory over Pharaoh at the Red Sea, Israel traveled three days into the wilderness of Shur without finding water. Arriving at Marah (Hebrew meaning bitterness) the water was undrinkable. Moses then threw a tree into the waters and the waters were made sweet or pleasant. The use of a tree here prefigures the Cross.

Elisha Heals the Waters at Jericho: (Vespers, 2 Kings 2:19-22) After Elisha returned from seeing Elijah taken up into heaven, the men of the city asked Elisha to do something about the bad water that was ruining their crops. Elisha asked for a jar of salt to be brought and then threw the salt into the source of the water saying: "I have healed these waters; there shall not be from there death or bereavement any longer". So the waters have been healed to this day.

The Lord's Baptism in the Jordan: (6th Hour and Blessing of Waters, Mark 1:9-11) During the Blessing of the Waters, the account of the Lord's baptism is read from Mark. The implication here is that the Lord did not need a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4) because He was God and without sin. By doing so, He sanctified the waters of baptism. Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople (8th Century) commented on this: "For Christ, who is above all purity to be baptized in the same waters as us, the waters of baptism become a cleansing for our souls. Salvation comes through washing, and through water the Spirit; by descending into the water we ascend to God" (Germanus, Katavasia for Epiphany Matins). Because the Lord sanctified the waters of baptism by consenting to be baptized, so the Church, His Body, does today. For additional details, see the Appendix I discussion for Psalm 77.

² The trench was large enough to hold a 2 *seah* bag of seed (3.5 gallon bag); this implies a trench cross section of a little less than 1 square foot. The waterpots were carried on the shoulders (Genesis 24:14-20, Judges 7:16-20) and held about 4 gallons each.

THE USE OF WATERS IN ETERNITY AND IN THE CHURCH

The Highway of Holiness: (1st Hour, Blessing of Waters, Isaiah 35:1-10) The prophesy of Isaiah 35 has some near term and some distant meaning. It speaks about the Arabah, in the Sinai Peninsula from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqabah, and how it will blossom profusely. “For waters will break froth in the wilderness and streams in the Arabah. And the scorched land will become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water... And a highway will be there, a roadway, and it will be called the Highway of Holiness” (Isaiah 35:6-8). While some implications are here concerning the end of time, these words also fit quite well concerning the spirituality of the “Desert Fathers” and the many monasteries that have been built in the Arabah over the last 19 centuries. These monasteries grew in a tradition that imitated the humble and ascetic life of John the Baptist, and many accounts of healing are associated with the men and women involved. For more on these monasteries, the entire issue of Biblical Archaeology Review, September/October 1995 was devoted to various aspects of currently active ones and excavations of former ones.

Water for Everyone Who Thirsts: (Blessing of Waters, Isaiah 55:1-13) The prophesy of Isaiah 55 also has some near term and some distant meaning. The chapter begins: “Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat” (Isaiah 55:1). This is reminiscent of Jesus’ remarks on the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles: “ ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water!’ This He spoke concerning the Spirit whom those believing in Him would receive...” (John 7:37-39). The eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles speaks of the Kingdom of God stretching out into eternity. But there is dual imagery here also. Isaiah 55:5 speaks of a Gentile nation that Israel doesn’t know who will run to them. Verses 8-11 then speak of how the Lord’s ways are higher than our ways and about how the Lord’s Word does not return to Him empty. There is a mystery here that was not revealed until the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles (Acts 10:9-17, 44-48); Paul had a major role in proclaiming this (Ephesians 3:7-10).

In Eternity the water is pictured as the river of the water of life that proceeds from the Throne of God, where the tree of life is on either side of it (Revelation 22:1-2, 21:6). In this age, we get a glimpse of all this in a mystery through the waters of baptism along with which we receive the Holy Spirit at Chrismation.

With Joy, Drawing Water from the Wells of Salvation: (6th Hour, Blessing of Waters, Isaiah 12:3-6) The prophesy of Isaiah 11 continues this dual imagery of near term and distant meaning. It begins with the shoot from the stem of Jesse (i.e. Jesus) and addresses His three year ministry (11:2) and the future Kingdom of Glory (11:6-9 where the wolf will lie down with the lamb).

Isaiah 12, which is one of the reading for the Blessing of the Waters, speaks of “joyously drawing water from the spring or well of salvation” and saying: “give thanks to the Lord, call on His Name. Make known His deeds among the peoples (Septuagint = Gentiles); make them remember that His Name is exalted” (vv.3-4). This the Church does now where the water is the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39) and the well of salvation is God the Father (Jeremiah 2:13, Revelation 22:1). And all this begins with the waters of baptism.

BAPTISM SAVES US

**January 6, 2010
Revision D**

EPISTLE LESSONS: Titus 2:11-3:7, Romans 6:1-11, 1 Peter 3:18-22

The Apostle Peter set the tone for understanding the impacts and workings of Baptism by comparing it to the days of Noah. Noah and his family (8 people) were saved through water. Corresponding to this, baptism now saves us (1 Peter 3:20-21).

Most people think of the Flood of Noah's day as steadily rising water and the voyage in the Ark as like a quiet ride in the park. However, if the Fountains of the Great Deep are identified with the volcanic deposits and fracture zones of the mid-oceanic ridges³, undersea volcanic explosions were present for at least the first 40 days of the Flood (Genesis 8:1-3). An undersea volcanic explosion occurs when seawater, under two tons per square inch of pressure comes in contact with the super hot core of the earth through a crack in the sea bottom. The sea water gets vaporized instantly on a massive scale into super heated steam under tremendously increased pressure due to the conversion from the liquid to the gaseous state. This literally blows the water off the sea floor and creates huge tidal waves (i.e. tsanumis) hundreds of feet high that sweep across the oceans very rapidly. Any boat floating on the ocean gets baptized thoroughly and completely by these waves.

But Noah and his family did not just get washed with water in the ark; there was also the answer of a good conscience toward God (1 Peter 3:21). Noah was referred to as a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5) and an heir of righteousness according to faith (Hebrews 11:7). When divinely warned, he moved with godly fear in obedience. The illustration of Noah is very profound and is also prophetic about the Lord's return: "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man" (Luke 17:26-27, Matthew 24:37-39). Then Noah was saved through a baptism of water; at the end of time the righteous will be saved through a baptism of fire (1 Corinthians 3:13-15, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8, 2 Peter 3:7).

Old Testament Epiphany Readings

Jacob's Return to Face Esau: (Vespers, Genesis 32:1-10) After Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a meal of lentil stew (Genesis 25:29-34), Jacob then tricked his father Isaac into giving him the firstborn's blessing also (Genesis 27). Esau planned to kill Jacob because of this (Genesis 27:41); so Isaac and Rebekah sent Jacob away to Rebekah's brother Laban (Genesis 28:1-5) where Jacob stayed for over 20 years. Finally the Lord told Jacob to return; on the way back, Jacob sent ahead word to Esau along with a large gift (Genesis 32:3-5). The messenger who brought the gift to Esau reported back to Jacob that Esau was hurrying to meet him along with 400 men. Jacob was petrified (Genesis 32:6-7).

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³ For maps of the Mid-Oceanic Ridges, see the National Geographic Society World Atlas.

Jacob spent the night in prayer, reminding the Lord of His promises and saying: “I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which Thou has shown to Thy servant... Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother...” (Genesis 32:10-11). Later when they met, Jacob said: “...for I see your (i.e. Esau’s) face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably” (Genesis 33:10).

This is part of the salvation of baptism: (1) One needs to come to the waters with a sense of unworthiness, depending entirely on the grace of God. (2) One needs to see the face of the priest as the face of God.

Elisha Heals Naaman: (Vespers, 2 Kings 5:9-14) Naaman was a valiant warrior, a great man, and highly respected as captain of the army of the king of Aram. But he was also a leper (2 Kings 5:1). After finding out about Elisha’s healing ability, Naaman went to Elisha’s house with his horses and chariots (vv.2-9). Elisha didn’t come out of the house; he just sent a messenger out to tell Naaman: “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh shall be restored to you and you shall be clean” (v.10).

Naaman was furious (1) because Elisha treated him as a servant and (2) because he thought the waters back home in Damascus were better than any in Israel, being farther upstream (vv.11-12). However, Naaman’s servants convinced him to just do what Elisha said without questioning. He did so and was healed (vv.13-14).

This story gives us further insight into the saving Grace of baptism. (1) Not just any water will do; only the waters of the Jordan that have been sanctified are effective for healing our curses. (2) No matter how great our position in the world may be, we all come as a servant to the waters of baptism to be saved.

Learning to do Good: (3rd Hour and Vespers, Isaiah 1:16-20) After John the Baptist referred to the Scribes and Pharisees as a brood of vipers (Luke 3:7-9, Matthew 3:7-12), many others asked what they should do. John said:

- Share your clothes and food with those who have none (Luke 3:11)
- Be honest Tax Collectors: collect just what’s appointed (Luke 3:12-13)
- Be content with what you have. Soldiers: don’t extort or falsely accuse those you’re protecting (Luke 3:14).

The Epiphany reading from Isaiah 1 gives additional information about “learning to do good”. The reading begins: “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from my sight, cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:16-17). Paul wrote to Titus a similar admonition for Titus as Bishop of Crete to convey to his people: “Those who believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men, they meet urgent needs and they render one not unfruitful” (Titus 3:8, 14). This is part of the working out of our salvation. As James said, “You see the faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected” (James 2:22).

A Day of Salvation and Light to the Gentiles: (9th Hour and Vespers, Isaiah 49:8-15) The Epiphany reading from Isaiah 49 begins: “Thus says the Lord, ‘In a favorable time I have

answered you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you’ “ (Isaiah 49:8). The help referred to is the Lord’s guidance to springs or fountains of water (v.10) which represents the Holy Spirit. Gentiles will be part of this: “Behold, they shall come from afar; and lo, these will come from the North and the West, and these from the land of Persia (v.12, Septuagint). The Church Fathers have interpreted (v.12) as referring to the Magi coming from Persia. In this day of salvation, the Lord will comfort His people (v.13) and have compassion on them (vv.10,13) as a nursing mother does her child (vv.14-15). Thus we receive the Comforter (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, Acts 9:31, Romans 8:15) with baptism and the newly baptized receive the pure milk of the Word (1 Peter 2:2).

NEW TESTAMENT EPIPHANY READINGS

The Epistle reading from Titus states: “...not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to His mercy He saves us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). So we are saved by baptism; but yet salvation is broader than a one-time event.

Scripture References to Salvation: There are three aspects to salvation referred to as follows:

We have been saved: Besides the reference in Titus above, many other places refer to salvation as having occurred at the time of our belief and baptism. For example, Ephesians 2:4-9 speaks how we **have been saved by Grace through faith** and made to sit in the heavenly places with Christ in the Church. 2 Timothy 1:9 refers to how we are saved and called with a holy calling according to His purpose and Grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

We will be saved: The Lord spoke on several occasions about: **“He who endures to the end will be saved”**. He said this to the Twelve as He sent them out two by two (Matthew 10:22) and again as He spoke of the times leading up to His coming in Glory (Matthew 24:13, Mark 13:13). Paul even took measures concerning a reprobate believer in an effort to secure his salvation on Judgment Day in spite of his current immoral behavior (1 Corinthians 5:5).

We are being saved: Paul spoke concerning the Word of the Cross (compare Mark 8:34-38) and how it “is foolishness to those who are perishing, but **to us who are being saved** it is the Power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). This is the action of the Cross in our lives. (For more on this, see The Word of the Cross Parts I and II). Hebrews also refers to our High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (that is, the Lord Jesus) who makes intercession for us and who is able to save to the complete end those who come to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25).

The Grace of God that Brings Salvation: The Epistle reading begins with “For the Grace of God that brings salvation has appeared (literally made His Epiphany) to all men” (Titus 2:11, 3:4). John Chrysostom points out: “Do not think that Grace stops at the pardon of former sins; it secures us against them in the future; for this is also of Grace. And this is of Grace, to deliver us from worldly things, and to lead us to heaven. He (Paul) speaks here of two appearances (i.e. Epiphanies); the first of grace, the second of retribution and justice” (Homily V on Titus 2).

The second aspect of Grace, Paul says, teaches us:

- to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (2:12)

- to live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age (2:12)
- to look for the blessed hope and glorious Epiphany of our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ (2:13)
- that the Lord is purifying for Himself, a people of His own possession, zealous for good works (2:14)
- to be subject to rulers and authorities (3:1)
- to obey and to be ready for every good work (3:1)
- to speak evil of no one (3:2)
- to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men (3:2)

The first aspect of Grace had already taught us:

- that the Holy Spirit has been poured out abundantly on us (3:6)
- that we are justified by His Grace (3:7)
- that we have become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (3:7)

The first aspect of Grace came with baptism when we were saved. The second aspect of Grace comes (1) as we take up our crosses in being saved in this age and (2) as we approach the Judgment Seat where we will be saved in the age to come.

Burial in Baptism is Part of Salvation: (6th Hour, Romans 6:1-11) Romans 6:1-21 is another of the Epiphany readings (at the 6th Hour) and gives additional details on the saving effects of baptism. As many as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death (v.3). This means that:

- we were buried with Him through baptism into death (v.4)
- we are united together in the likeness of His death (v.5)
- our old man was crucified with Him (v.6, Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:9, Galatians 2:20, 5:24, 6:14)
- he who has died has been freed from sin (v.7)
- the body of sin has been done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin (v.6, 2 Peter 2:19, John 8:34)
- we are also united together in the likeness of His resurrection (v.5, Philippians 3:10) if we have been united to His death
- having been raised from the dead, Christ dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him (v.9) or us
- as Christ was raised, so we should walk in newness of life (v.4).

John Chrysostom comments on this as follows: “Baptism is the Cross. What the Cross and Burial is to Christ, baptism has been to us, even if not in the same respects. For He died Himself and was buried in the flesh, but we have done both to sin... For if you have shared in death and burial, much more will you share in the resurrection and life.”

“After the resurrection to come had been set before us, He demands of us something additional, which is brought about in the present life by a change in habits” (Homily X on Romans 5).

Thus being buried with Christ in His death saves us from death itself and all its consequences.

APPENDIX I

ASPECTS OF BAPTISM FROM THE PSALMS

Psalm 42 - Hope During Persecution

Psalm 42 begins with a reference to a deer seeking water. The deer referred to (Hebrew: *ayyal* = fallow deer) is a small (3 feet at the shoulders), swift creature that was highly prized for its meat. It was known to seek out good pastures and required a great amount of water for a small creature⁴. The analogy presented is that as the fallow deer pants for flowing water, so my soul thirsts for God (v.1). At the same time, the Psalmist declares that his tears have been his food day and night while people continually say to him “where is your God?” (v.3).

In times past, the Psalmist remembers as he pours out his soul, how he used to lead throngs of people to the House of God with rejoicing and praise as they made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (v.4). This was required by the Mosaic Law of all Jewish men three times per year: at Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16:16-17, Exodus 23:14-17, 34:21-23). The Psalmist remembers these occasions fondly as his “appearing before God” (v.2).

This Psalm is attributed to one of the sons of Korah. Korah, a great-grandson of Levi, had died while leading a rebellion against Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16), but his sons did not die with him (Numbers 26:11). The Korahites (sons of Korah) at the time of David were loyal to David and helped him when he was at Ziklag (near Beersheba) in the Negev (1 Chronicles 12:6). They were also gatekeepers of the camp of the sons of Levi and gatekeepers of the tent of meeting (1 Chronicles 9:17-19). Heman the Prophet (1 Chronicles 25:1) was also of the sons of Korah (1 Chronicles 6:18-33, and the sons of Korah were prominent later in the Temple service as musicians and Psalmists (2 Chronicles 20:19).

There have been many time periods proposed for the writing of this Psalm, but the most likely is during the time David was fleeing from the rebellion of Absalom. During that time, David stayed for a while in Mahanaim, which is in the mountains of Gilead to the East of the Jordan (2 Samuel 17:24-27). From there, one can see Mt. Hermon rising in the distance (Psalm 42:6), and the Psalmist refers to remembering God from the land of the Jordan (v.6). The hill “Mizar” is not easy to identify and is probably located outside the borders of Israel.

On the way to Mahanaim, when David passed through Bahurim on the West Bank of the Jordan, Abishai, a relative of King Saul, began cursing and mocking David as he went along (2 Samuel 16:5-8). David’s men wanted to cut off his head, but David didn’t allow that. Instead he said, “Let him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him. Perhaps the Lord will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing this day” (2 Samuel 16:9-12). The author of the Psalm was probably there to share in the humiliation being generated by Abishai. At the same time, Absalom was busy organizing all of Israel to pursue David beyond the Jordan (2 Samuel 17:1-14).

⁴ G. Christian Weiss, Insight into Bible Times and Customs, Good News Broadcasting Association, Lincoln NE, 1972, p. 123.

During this time of running for their lives, hiding out where they could, and depending on sporadic provisions just to eat (2 Samuel 17:26-29), the Psalmist writes:

- Deep calls to deep through the noise of Your waterfalls (v.7)
- All Your waves and billows have gone over me (v.7)
- Why have You forgotten me? (V.9)
- I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy (v.9)
- My enemies' reproach is like the crushing of bones (v.10)
- All day long they say, "Where is your God"? (vv.10,3)

Some of the tributaries to the Jordan in the area that David's men were heading for, include streams with waterfalls. As they passed the waterfalls, the noise spoke to them several things:

- The pounding of the water reminded them of the enemies' continual pounding on them as the "waves and billows go over them."
- The "deep" is often synonymous with the forces of evil (Psalm 69:14-15; where Psalm 69 speaks of Christ on the cross as in Psalm 69:21). Deep calling to deep implies rounding up all the forces of evil as Absalom sought to do to his father David.
- Deep can also imply the necessity to call on a faith that is strengthened by persecution.

The Psalmist concludes with: "Hope in God, for still I thank Him for the salvation of my face and my God" (v.12). The Psalmist is counting on the Lord for rescue in some way that is not obvious. He can't see his way out of this dilemma and therefore only has hope. As Paul said: "Hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?" (Romans 8:24).

Psalm 74: A Prayer During Oppression:

Psalm 74 was written by one of King David's musician-prophets named Asaph. The Psalms he wrote are Psalms 73-83 and Psalm 50. Under the direction of David, Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun prophesied with their musical instruments and songs (1 Chronicles 25:1-6).

The Psalm begins with the Lord's anger against His people, and Asaph asks why: "Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?" (v.1). But yet this Psalm is directed at more than just Israel of old; it is directed at the Church throughout the ages. "Remember Your congregation which You have purchased of old, which You have redeemed to be the tribe of Your inheritance, and Mount Zion where You have dwelt" (v.2).

Augustine of Hippo (4th Century) notes the play on words here between "Asaph" and "congregation". *Asaph* means to gather or to congregate and is sometimes translated by *sunago* (Greek: to gather) from which comes the noun *sunagoge* (Greek: synagogue). The title of the Psalm in the Greek Septuagint is "A Psalm of Instruction for Asaph" and its message is something the people of God can learn from.

The Lord's people are described as "purchased of old" and "redeemed". In David's day, they were purchased at the Exodus from Egypt and redeemed as part of the Law (Exodus 15:13,

Numbers 18:15-16). All this pointed forward to the Great Redemption of Christ on the Cross. At Epiphany, this is revealed because we are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3).

Verses 3-11 describe a widespread destruction among the people of God. For example:

- The sanctuary is badly damaged (v.3)
- The enemy has roared in the midst of the Lord's meeting place for the festivals (v.4, Zephaniah 3:1-4)
- The enemy has set up his own flags for prophetic signs (v.4)
- They smash the carved work (in the Temple 1 Kings 6:18, 29, 32, 35) with axes and hammers (v.5)
- They have set fire to God's Sanctuary (v.7, 2 Kings 25:9)
- They have defiled the Lord's dwelling place (v.7, Lamentations 2:2)
- They have said in their heart: "Let us oppress them (the Lord's people) and abolish (or burn down) all the meeting places for the festivals (v.8, Psalm 83:4)
- There are no prophets for the Lord anymore (v.9, Lamentation 2:9)
- Will the enemy blaspheme the Lord's Name forever (v.10)?

All of the above describe the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon very well; so well, that some people feel that the Psalm may have been written by one of the descendants of Asaph during the captivity and not by the Prophet Asaph himself.

The solution to all this destruction is given in the verses that follow and refer to the Cross and to baptism:

- God is our King from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth (i.e. the Cross).
- You divided the sea by Your strength and set all the borders of the earth (vv.13, 17, Genesis 1:6,9).
- You broke the heads of the sea monsters (i.e. Satan; see discussion for Psalm 91) and gave him as food for the people in the wilderness (vv.13,14).
- You broke open the fountain and the flood (v.15, Numbers 20:11, Psalm 105:41).
- You dried up mighty rivers (v.15, Exodus 14:21-22, Joshua 2:10, 3:13).

Just as it is the Power of God that does all this, so it is the Power of God in the waters of our baptism that frees us from the dominion of sin and death (Romans 6:4, 9). This allows us to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:18-19).

The Psalm continues to address how this works out among the poor, who are usually the ones affected most by upheaval. Speaking in defense of the poor, the Psalm pleads:

- Remember that the enemy has blasphemed and despised Your Name (vv.18, 10, 22)
- Do not deliver the soul of Your turtledove to the wild beasts; do not forget the life of Your poor forever (v.19)
- Look upon Your covenant, for the dark places of the earth are the abodes of violent lawlessness (v.20)
- Do not let the crushed ones return ashamed; let the poor and needy praise Your Name (v.21)
- Arise, O God, contend for Your own cause; remember Your reproach from the fool all day long (v.22, 10, 18)
- Do not forget the voice of Your enemies; the roar of Your foes ascends continually (v.23, 4).

By the poor is meant the poor in spirit who have humbled themselves before God. Augustine described the “poor man” from Isaiah 66:2 as “the humble, men trembling at the words of God, confessing their sins, relying neither on their own merits nor on their own righteousness. When they do anything of good, they praise God; when they do anything of evil, they accuse themselves” (Exposition on Psalm 74, 21).

These poor in spirit have been persecuted since time began, beginning with righteous Abel (Hebrews 11:4, Matthew 23:35). They are referred to as a turtledove (v.19), which is a very gentle creature that was used as an offering in place of a lamb for people too poor to afford a lamb (Leviticus 5:6, 7). This Mary and Joseph did at the birth of Jesus because of their poverty (Luke 2:24). The Psalmist asks that the soul of God’s turtledove be spared from the wild beasts that roar in the midst of the Lord’s meeting place (v.4) all day long (v.23). These “wild beasts” are those who are under the control of the sea monsters and leviathan (vv.13, 14). The Apostle Jude calls them, “rocks (i.e. reefs) in your love feasts”, “clouds without water”, “trees without fruit”, “waves foaming up their own shame”, and “wandering stars for whom the black darkness is reserved” (Jude 1:10-13).

One might note that the “wild beasts” are within the Church. The love feasts that Jude referred to in the 1st. Century included the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-22); later Church Councils decreed that a fast should precede the Lord’s Supper (Synod of Laodicea 343 AD, Canon 1; Council of Carthage, 419 AD, Canon xli). Similarly, the “wild beasts” are roaring in the midst of the Lord’s meeting place for the festivals (v.4). The Lord warned His Apostles about such wolves, calling them false prophets, trees without fruit and those who practice lawlessness (Matthew 7:15-23). Paul warned the Ephesian elders about the same thing (Acts 20:29).

It is because of these that the Lord’s anger smokes against the sheep of His pasture (v.1). This is not supposed to be a part of the Lord’s congregation, which He purchased of old and which He redeemed to be the tribe of His inheritance (v.2). Therefore there will be a righteous judgment on those who have been baptized into Christ but have chosen to live according to the will of their father the devil (John 8:44).

Psalm 77 - A Challenge from the Gates of Hell

Psalm 77 addresses a struggle against an unseen, yet ever tenacious enemy. As Paul said, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against Principalities, against Authorities, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

The Psalm begins: “I cried out to the Lord”; “In the day of my trouble, I sought the Lord. My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing; my soul refused to be comforted” (vv.1, 2). It was customary in ancient Israel to pray in a standing position with one’s arms stretched out upward. (Compare Luke 18:11). That Asaph, the Psalmist was doing this at night indicates that he was observing the seven Hours of Prayer discussed in Psalm 5 (q.v.). This was such a battle for him that:

- His soul refused to be comforted (v.2)

- His spirit fainted (v.3)
- He was so troubled he couldn't speak (v.4)
- He meditates in his heart and his spirit searches (v.6).
-

Verse 4 reads literally, "You seized the watches of my eyes". The Greek (Septuagint) translates this "All my enemies set a watch against me". Augustine in commenting on this said that the spiritual enemies the Psalmist was fighting "have watched more to deceive than I to guard myself. They have set everywhere scandals, everywhere traps. Weariness invests his heart and he has to fear lest sorrow swallow him up" (Exposition on Psalm 77, 6).

The deceit takes the form of denying the mercy of God. The thoughts of darkness given him are:

- The Lord will cast him off forever and will no more be pleased (v.7).
- The Lord's mercy has ceased and His word has failed for all generations (v.8).
- He has forgotten to be gracious; He has shut up His tender mercies in His anger (v.9).

The above is reminiscent of the ordeal that the Patriarch Job suffered. In his day, Job was unsurpassed in righteousness (Job 1:8). Yet the Lord allowed Satan to take away all his wealth, his ten children, plus his health, leaving him sitting among the ashes scraping the pus off his skin boils with a piece of broken pottery (Job 1:13-22, 2:7-8). To add insult to injury, Job's friends then began to inquire of him which of his secret sins had brought this calamity on him (Job 4:7-21, 8:1-6, 11:1-20). Job grew spiritually because of all the evil that he had to bear and he was rewarded both in this life and in the age to come (Job 42:10-17, James 5:11).

The Psalmist's answer in his hour of darkness is to remember all that the Lord has done:

- I will remember the years of the Right Hand of the Most High (v.10)
- I will remember and meditate on the works of the Lord, His wonders of old (vv.11,12,14)
- Your Way, O God, is in holiness (v.13)
- With Your Arm, You have redeemed Your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph (v.15).

The Arm (v.15) and the Right Hand (v.10) of God refers to Christ who is seated at the Right Hand of Power and will come on the clouds of heaven (Hebrews 10:12, Acts 7:55, Mark 14:62, Psalm 110:1, Psalm 98:1).

We note that His Arm has redeemed Jacob and Joseph. This is unusual since Joseph is the son of Jacob who was sold as a slave into Egypt by his brothers. While in Egypt, he rose to a commanding position, second only to Pharaoh (Genesis 41:39-40), and married an Egyptian woman (Genesis 41:45), the daughter of the Priest of On (pronounced Own). Augustine interpreted this reference to Jacob (i.e. Israel) and Joseph as implying both the Jews and the Gentiles (Ibid. 16).

Verses 16-20 have a special meaning that is connected to the Lord's baptism: "The waters saw You, O God; the waters saw You and whirled; the depths agitated" (v.16). Hippolytus (3rd. Century martyr) addressed God's gift of water as follows: "What more requisite gift is there than water? For with water all things are washed and nourished, and cleansed and bedewed. Water bears the earth, water produces the dew, water exhilarates the vine. Water matures the corn in the ear, water ripens the grape-cluster, water softens the olive,

water sweetens the palm-date, water reddens the rose and decks the violet, water makes the lily bloom with its brilliant cups. And why should I speak at length? Without the element of water, none of the present order of things can subsist. So necessary is the element of water; for the other elements took their places beneath the highest vault of the heavens, but the nature of water obtained a seat also above the heavens (Genesis 1:7). And to this the prophet himself is a witness, when he exclaims, "Praise the Lord, ye heaven of heavens, and the water that is above the heavens" (Psalm 148:4).

Nor is this the only thing that proves the dignity of the water. But there is also that which is more honorable than all -- the fact that Christ, the Maker of all, came down as the rain (Hosea 6:2,3), and was known as a spring (John 4:14) and diffused Himself as a river (John 7:38), and was baptized in the Jordan (Matthew 3:13ff). For you have just heard how Jesus came to John, and was baptized by him in the Jordan. Oh things strange beyond compare! How should the Boundless River (Psalm 46:4) that makes glad the city of God have been dipped in a little water! The Illimitable Spring that bears life to all men, and has no end, was covered by poor and temporary waters! He who is present everywhere, and absent nowhere -- who is incomprehensible to angels and invisible to men -- comes to the baptism according to His own good pleasure. When you hear these things, beloved, take them not as if spoken literally, but accept them as presented in a figure. Whence also the Lord was not unnoticed by the watery element in what He did in secret, in the kindness of His condescension to man. "For the waters saw Him, and were afraid" (Psalm 77:16). They well-nigh broke from their place, and burst away from their boundary. Hence the prophet, having this in his view many generations ago, puts the question, "What ails you O sea, that you fled; and you Jordan, that you were driven back?" (Psalm 114:5). And they in reply said, We have seen the Creator of all things in the "form of a servant" (Philippians 2:7) and being ignorant of the mystery of the economy, we were lashed with fear (Discourse on the Holy Theophany, 1 & 2).

The Psalm concludes that "Your way is in the sea and Your path in the great waters; and Your footsteps are not known" (v.19). Melito (or Meliton), the 2nd Century Bishop of Sardis, wrote that the above passage refers to the Lord's secret operations (Fragments, ix, from The Key). Paul described this as "the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations but now has been revealed to His saints" (Colossians 1:26, also Romans 16:25, Ephesians 1:9). This mystery was hidden even from the rulers of this age; had they known, they wouldn't have crucified the Lord (1 Corinthians 2:8).

The connection of the Lord's secret operations to the waters is that the ancient understanding of the abyss (Luke 8:31, Revelation 9:1, 20:3) was the ocean bottom. The waters themselves are not the abyss, but they cover the abyss. When the waters are rolled back, the abyss is exposed.

"You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (v.20). He led them like a flock to trample on the abyss as they crossed the Red Sea (Isaiah 63:11), which was five to eight miles wide where the crossing occurred. Similarly when the New Jerusalem descends out of heaven, there will no longer be any sea (Revelation 21:1), and the abyss will be exposed. For more insight into the waters of the Lord's Epiphany, see the section titled "The Blessing of the Waters".

Psalm 114 - Creation Responds to God

The time period referred to by Psalm 114 is the time of the Exodus: “When Israel went out of Egypt” (v.1). At this time, Israel became His dominion or kingdom and Judah became His sanctuary or holiness (v.2). The borders of the nation were that of Israel; but within Israel was Judah, the location of the Temple in Jerusalem. They had begun to be a kingdom of priests as the Lord had sought at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:6).

Creation responded to the Lord enthroned among His people on four occasions recorded here:

- The (Red) Sea saw and fled (vv. 3, 5; Exodus 14:21-27)
- The Jordan River saw and turned back (vv.3,5, Joshua 3:9-17)
- The mountains skipped like rams; the little hills, like lambs (vv.4, 6, 7; Exodus 19:18; Judges 5:5; Jeremiah 4:24)
- The rock was turned into a pool and fountain of water (v.8; Exodus 17:5-7; 1 Corinthians 10:4).

Just at the Twelve were stunned when the Lord commanded the wind and the waves on the Sea of Galilee and they obeyed Him (Mark 4:37-41), so people were stunned and frightened when they saw creation respond to its Creator (Exodus 14:25; Joshua 2:9-11, 5:1; Exodus 19:16).

APPENDIX II

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST IN THE PSALMS

Psalm 5 - Prayers of the Hours

In Psalm 5, we get a glimpse of King David's prayer life which was similar to the Prayers of the Hours. Athanasius of Alexandria (4th Century) stated that David arose seven times daily (Psalm 119:164) including during the middle of the night, to give thanks for the righteous judgments of God (Easter Festal Letter vi, 12). When David says "In the morning, O Lord, Thou wilt hear my voice; in the morning I will order my prayer to Thee and eagerly watch" (v.3), he is referring to the morning prior to dawn in addition to the Prayers of the Hours. Third Hour, 6th Hour and 9th Hour Prayers were customary for David (Psalm 55:17), where 3rd Hour and 9th Hour were also the customary times for the morning and evening continual burnt offering (Exodus 29:38-42, Numbers 28:3-8). Daniel followed this pattern also (Daniel 6:10).

The Early Church continued this tradition of the Prayers of the Hours. In this regard, the title of this Psalm is "Concerning He that Inherits" (LXX) referring to the Church. Some examples are Peter and John at home at 9th Hour Prayers (Acts 3:1), Peter away from home at 6th Hour Prayers (Acts 10:9), and Cornelius at 9th Hour Prayers (Acts 10:3). The Lord addressed this also, saying that "men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). He then followed that statement with the parable of the widow vs. the unjust judge where she got her justice by her continual pleading.

This type of prayer can be called a continual prayer from the analogy of the continual burnt offering. Other examples from Paul's writings are:

- Praying always with all prayer and supplication (Ephesians 6:18)
- Always in every prayer of mine making request for you (Philippians 1:4)
- Praying always for you (Colossians 1:3)
- We do not cease to pray for you (Colossians 1:9)
- Continue earnestly in prayer being vigilant (Colossians 4:2)
- Night and day praying exceedingly (1 Thessalonians 3:10)
- Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- A widow continues in prayer and supplication night and day (1 Timothy 5:5)
- Without ceasing, I remember you in my prayers night and day (2 Timothy 1:3).

David's prayer in Psalm 5 is largely a request to be freed from being downtrodden. He spoke of his groaning (v.1) and his cry for help (v.2) against those who:

- Take pleasure in wickedness (v.4)
- Are boastful (v.5)
- Speak falsehood (vv.6,9)
- Have an open grave for a throat (v.9)
- Are flatterers (v.9)

David acknowledged that the Lord abhors falsehood and will destroy those who speak falsehood (v.6).

One beneficial aspect of the regular prayer referred to in Psalm 5 is that we open up and bare our soul to the Lord. Jerome (4th Century) in commenting on verse 8 said, "Solomon says,

‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean upon your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths’ (Proverbs 3:5, 6). Understand what He says: that we must not trust in our wisdom, but in the Lord alone, by Whom the steps of a man are directed. Lastly, we are bidden to show Him our ways and make them known, for they are not made straight by our own labor, but by His assistance and mercy. And so it is written, ‘make My way right before Thy Face’ (Psalm 5:8 LXX), so that what is right to Him may seem also right to me. Solomon says the same, ‘Commit your works unto the Lord and your thoughts shall be established’ (Proverbs 16:3). Our thoughts are then established when we commit all we do to the Lord our helper, resting it, as it were, upon the firm and solid rock, and attribute everything to Him” (Dialog Against the Pelagians, III, 8). The result is described as follows: “For it is You Who bless the righteous man, O Lord; You surround him with favor as with a shield” (v.12). The underlying suggestion in all this is that righteousness is far more important than wealth and that poverty is no big deal.

Psalm 23 - Christ, the Good Shepherd

It was customary in David’s time for the youngest in the family to tend the sheep owned by the family. Since David was the youngest son of Jesse, this was his job while his older brothers went off to battle against the Philistines (1 Samuel 16:11, 17:12-18). During his shepherding, David killed both a lion and a bear in hand to hand fighting (1 Samuel 17:32-36).

Christ also said that He is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11) and He is also the door to the sheepfold (John 10:7). Anyone who tries to enter the sheepfold without coming in by the door is a thief and a robber (John 10:1). As the Good Shepherd, He laid His life down for the sheep (John 10:15), just as David put his life on the line protecting his family’s sheep.

This Psalm goes beyond just caring for the sheep with green pastures, still water (v.2) and freedom from fear in the valley of the shadow of death (v.4). The Good Shepherd also sets a table before us in the presence of our enemies. This table has generally been interpreted as the Lord’s Table (1 Corinthians 10:21) which is the Lord’s Supper. To be welcome at the Lord’s Table, He needs to lead us in the paths of righteousness (v.3). For we need to examine ourselves before partaking of the Lord’s body and blood in order to avoid eating and drinking judgment on ourselves by not discerning the Lord’s body (1 Corinthians 11:28, 29).

The result is that around the Lord’s Table, He anoints our head with oil (v.5) and makes us kings and priests to God the Father (Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 1 Peter 2:5, 9). Around the Lord’s Table, our cup runs over (v.5) as the Lord does “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us (Ephesians 3:20). And we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever (v.6), in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21, 22).

Psalm 27 - The Song of the Newly Baptized

Besides being sung at the Eve of Epiphany, this Psalm is also sung at Baptismal services just before the reading of the Epistle lesson for the Baptism service: Romans 6:3-11. Just as Christ was tempted by the devil immediately following His baptism (Matthew 4:1-11), so the newly baptized can expect to do battle with the Principalities, Powers, rulers of the darkness of this age and the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12).

The battles David mentioned in this Psalm were:

- The wicked coming against him (v.2)
- An army encamped against him (v.3)
- War rising against him (v.3)
- Father and mother forsaking him (v.10)
- False witnesses who breathe out violence (v.11).

David's answer to all these was to inquire of the Lord at every turn. For example, just after David was made king over all Israel (2 Samuel 5:3), the Philistines attacked. David inquired of the Lord as to what to do, then did what the Lord said and was victorious (2 Samuel 5:17-21). The Philistines attacked again and David inquired of the Lord again. The Lord gave David a different strategy and he was victorious again (2 Samuel 5:22-25).

David's custom of inquiring of the Lord regularly is reflected in this Psalm:

- The Lord is the strength of my life (v.1)
- Because of this, he does not need to fear (vv.1, 3)
- His primary focus is to dwell in the house of the Lord and to inquire in His Temple (vv.4, 8)
- God will hide him in the secret place of His Tabernacle (v.5)
- He will offer sacrifices of joy in His Tabernacle (v.6)
- God will take care of him (vv.9, 10)
- He would have lost heart unless he had believed (vv.13, 14).

In our lives, many times we face questions about what we should do. In the above example regarding David vs. The Philistines, it was easy to see that going after the enemies of God was a good and noble endeavor. But David inquired of the Lord anyway to be sure. Sometimes what appear to be good and noble endeavors can be a trap to lead us into materialist dependence or to cause our lives to be filled with strife and bitterness and make it difficult to discern the Lord's voice. When we are faced with these situations, we need to return to David's focus: dwelling in the house of the Lord and inquiring in His Temple (vv.4, 8).

Psalm 29 - The Kingdom of God in Glory

Psalm 29 contains the expression: "The voice of the Lord" seven times as follows: The voice of the Lord:

- thunders over the waters (v.3)
- is powerful (v.4)
- is full of majesty (v.4)
- breaks and splinters the cedars of Lebanon (v.5)
- cuts through the flames of fire (v.7)
- shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh (v.8)
- makes the deer give birth (i.e. prematurely) and strips the forest bare (v.9)

The word translated "voice" (Hebrew: *qol*) is also translated "thunder" in many places (Exodus 9:23-34, 19:16 & 19, 20:18; 1 Samuel 7:10, 12:17 & 18). So this Psalm could be called The Psalm of Seven Thunders.

In the Orthodox Church, this Psalm is used at Epiphany because of the Father's voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism saying, "This is My Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased"

(Matthew 3:17). The Father's voice was also heard from heaven during Holy Week, 30 AD in response to Jesus' request for the Father to glorify His Name. The Father said: "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again" (John 12:28). People standing around who heard this thought it had thundered; others thought an angel had spoken to Jesus (John 12:29). The Father's voice at Jesus' baptism was a fulfillment of Psalm 29.

Another reference to "seven thunders" is given in Revelation 10:3-4. However, the Apostle John was instructed not to write down the things that the seven thunders uttered, but to seal them up. This relates to the finishing of the mystery of God as He declared to His servants the prophets (Revelation 10:7).

The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament c. 200 BC) adds a title to Psalm 29 based on its common usage at that time: "A Solemn Assembly of the Tabernacle" (Greek: *exodion skenes*). This term *exodion* is used almost exclusively in the Septuagint for the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:36, Numbers 29:35, 2 Chronicles 7:9, Nehemiah 8:18). The Feast of Tabernacles generally refers to the coming of the Lord in glory and the eighth day speaks of His Kingdom stretching out into eternity.

The message of the Psalm speaks very much of the Kingdom of God in glory. For example:

- Give to the Lord the glory due His Name (v.2)
- Worship the Lord in the beauty of His Holiness (v.2)
- In His Temple everyone says "Glory" (v.9)
- The Lord sat enthroned at the Flood and the Lord sits as King forever (v.10)
- The Lord will give strength to His people (v.11)
- The Lord will bless His people with peace (v.11).

This relates to baptism in that it points forward to what we are being baptized into. And we are reminded of the awesome strength of the Lord as we remember our baptism in our day to day life.

Psalm 51 - Repentance

It is possible for a person to be downtrodden because of his own sins. This also creates a "brokenhearted" condition. Psalm 51 is titled, "A Psalm of David when Nathan the Prophet came to him after he had gone in to Bathsheba." This is a reference to David's sin of seducing Bathsheba and then having her husband killed in battle so he could marry her (2 Samuel 11, 12). Bathsheba then became the mother of Solomon (2 Samuel 12:24) and was one of the ancestors of Christ (Matthew 1:6).

Intrigue such as this in the palaces of kings was common in those days and still occurs today. But the Lord clearly expected better of David and He sent Nathan the Prophet to confront David. -David repented, and the words of this Psalm are some of the songs David wrote in his repentance. The Lord forgave David, but because of the blasphemy caused by his sin (2 Samuel 12:14), He also sent David some reminders of the consequences of his sin:

- The sword shall never depart from your house (2 Samuel 12:10, 2 Samuel 20, 21)
- I will raise up evil from your own household (2 Samuel 12:11, 2 Samuel 13, 15, 17, 18; 1 Kings 1)

- I will take your wives and give them to your companion who will lie with them in broad daylight (2 Samuel 12:11-12, 16:21-23)

The same is true of us: there are always consequences to our sins even after our repentance.

The Psalm also states: “Behold Thou dost desire truth in the innermost parts and in the hidden part Thou wilt make me to know wisdom” (v.6). This speaks of the consequences of our sin. Just because we are forgiven does not mean that we suffer no consequences from what we’ve done. And there is wisdom that is learned from seeing the consequences of our own deeds.

Psalm 51 is also used in the Orthodox lectionary as one of the chanted “songs” for Matins prior to the Sunday and Feast Day Liturgy. The heartfelt words of David in response to being confronted with adultery and murder are useful for us also. This Psalm is not speaking of the heathen or of unbelievers, but to the people of God. All have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God (Romans 3:23). Therefore, as we approach the Throne of God to receive the Lord’s gifts (the Lord’s Supper), no one need despair; this Psalm shows that even David’s monstrous sin can be forgiven. As Augustine said, “Many men will to fall with David and will **not** to rise with David. Not then for falling is the example set forth, but, if you shall have fallen, for rising again. For this it was set forth, for this it was written, for this in the Church it is often read and chanted. Let them hear that have not fallen, lest they fall; let them hear that have fallen, that they may rise” (Exposition on Psalm li, 3).

An important aspect of repentance is confession, or the setting of our sin before us: “My sin is ever before me” (v.3). Before Nathan the Prophet came to David, his sin was hidden. In confronting David, Nathan had David pronounce judgment on himself using the illustration of the poor man’s sheep (2 Samuel 12:1-5). David’s response was to admit his sin and to remove the plank from his own eye, not to try to remove a speck from another’s eye (Matthew 7:5). Similarly in the Orthodox liturgical cycle, there is a time for personal confession prior to receiving the Lord’s gifts, usually at Great Vespers (Saturday) but also at Matins.

We note that David said to the Lord, “Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Thy sight. So that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak and blameless when Thou dost judge” (v.4). Just as David confessed his sin to Nathan the Prophet and received forgiveness from God (2 Samuel 12:13), so we confess our sin to the priest and receive forgiveness from God.

The result of God’s forgiveness is described as “purify me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow” (v.7). Hyssop was also used to apply the blood of the Paschal lamb to the doorposts and lintel during the Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12:7) and every year thereafter (Exodus 12:14). This was done to foreshadow Christ as our Paschal Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7, John 1:29). In addition, Augustine stated that hyssop was a humble herb that was used for healing (Ibid, 12). Part of the healing is a humbling of ourselves before the Lord as David described (vv.8-12). In David’s words “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise” (v.17). Only then can we “build the walls of Jerusalem” (v.18), that is the New Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 6:16, Revelation 21:2). Then sacrifices are acceptable (Psalm 51:19); then we can present our bodies as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1) and offer the sacrifice of praise with our lips (Hebrews 13:15).

Psalm 86 - The Poor and Downtrodden

There were times in the life of King David when he lived as a fugitive. In this Psalm, he chants: “O God, arrogant men have risen up against me, and a band of violent men have sought my life, and they have not set Thee before them” (v.14). This probably refers to the time David was a fugitive from King Saul (1 Samuel 19-31) but could also refer to the time he was a fugitive from his son Absalom, who tried to usurp the throne (2 Samuel 15-18). During this time, David lived sometimes in a cave (1 Samuel 22:1, 24:3), sometimes in the wilderness (1 Samuel 23:14, 24:1), and sometimes hid in a city (1 Samuel 23:7). He was often hungry and destitute and had to depend on sporadic provisions (1 Samuel 25:18, 2 Samuel 16:1); at one time he even ate the consecrated bread from the Temple that only the priests were to eat (Matthew 12:4, 1 Samuel 21:6).

David began this Psalm “Incline Your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy” (v.1). Along with poverty often comes humility; on the other hand, worldly wealth often generates pride. And “the Lord resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5, Proverbs 3:34 LXX). Some of the Patriarchs like Abraham and Job were wealthy **and** humble, but this is unusual.

In his poverty, David pleaded that the Lord would preserve his soul, for he was a godly man who trusts in the Lord (v.2). This he cried “all day long” (v.5) in the Prayers of the Hours. The word “godly” (Hebrew: *chasid* = pious, kind) is not the same as the word that referred to the consecration of the priests (Hebrew: *gadosh* = holy). Regarding the godly (*chasid*), the Lord set them apart for Himself (Psalm 4:3); they are those who made a covenant with Him by sacrifice (Psalm 50:5). They sing to the Lord (Psalm 30:4, 132:9, 16), love the Lord (Psalm 31:23), bless the Lord (Psalm 145:10) and pray (Psalm 32:6); the Lord does not forsake them (Psalm 37:28), speaks peace to them (Psalm 85:8), speaks in vision to them (Psalm 89:19) and preserves their souls (Psalm 97:10, 116:15).

In his humility before God, David acknowledged the majesty and omnipotence of God:

- There is no one like You among the gods (v.8).
- You made all nations (v.9).
- All nations will worship and glorify You (v.9).
- You perform miracles (v.10).

And he asked the Lord to teach him His Way in order that he might walk in His Truth and fear His Name (v.11). “For You have delivered my soul from the lowest sheol” (v.13). This term “lowest sheol” was called Tartarus and was mentioned by Peter as the place for the angels who sinned (2 Peter 2:4), and was also referred to by Moses (Deuteronomy 32:22).

Psalm 91 - Christ’s Relationship with His Father

Psalm 91 speaks of the Father’s relationship with His Son in His Son’s humanity. Satan quoted from vv.11-12 during his temptation of Christ in the wilderness: “He shall give His angels charge concerning You to keep You in all Your ways. They shall bear You up on their hands, lest You dash Your foot against a stone” (Matthew 4:6, Luke 4:10-11).

As part of this relationship, the Son

- Dwells in the help of the Highest

- Sojourns under the shelter of the God of Heaven
- He is His helper and refuge
- He shall deliver Him from the snare of the hunter, (e.g. The Scribes and Pharisees)
- His Truth shall cover Him with a shield
- He shall not be afraid of
 - Terror by night (e.g. The arrest in the Garden)
 - The evil thing that walks in darkness
 - Calamity (calming the wind and the waves)
 - Evil spirits at noonday
 - Thousands being killed nearby (e.g. The innocent children of Bethlehem)
- He shall tread on the asp, the basilisk, the young lion and the dragon

The last item needs some explanation. The word “dragon” is the Hebrew word *tannin* and the Greek (Septuagint) word *drakon*. It is an ocean-going creature (Isaiah 27:1, 51:9-10, Ezekiel 32:2, Genesis 1:21, Psalm 148:7) that is very large and awesomely fearsome (Job 41). Leviathan is called a dragon and a twisted or winding serpent (Isaiah 27:1) and this imagery is used of Satan as a *drakon* (Revelation 12:7-9). The “basilisk” is the Greek word *basiliskos*, and the Hebrew word used for this is *shachal* meaning lion. A basilisk was a legendary reptile who could kill by the breath of its mouth. The Greek and Hebrew obviously differ in identifying this creature.

To tread on all these creatures requires Divine strength, and Jesus used this same imagery when He sent the Seventy out two by two. He said they “had been given the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy” (Luke 10:19), where their mission was not one of fighting flesh and blood, (Ephesians 6:12). The Lord summarized their mission by saying that He “saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). Much of this same imagery of the Father’s relationship with the Son and the Son giving authority to the Twelve is also the subject of John 17. See the Gospel lesson for the Sunday of the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council (the 7th Sunday of Pascha) for more details.

Psalm 93 - The Lord Rules Creation

Psalm 93 is titled in the Septuagint “For the day before the Sabbath, when the land was first inhabited”. Thus in the worship of ancient Israel, this Psalm was used on a Friday and commemorated the sixth day of Creation. The Sabbath was established as a day of rest for man so that he might remember how the Lord created the earth in six days and rested on the seventh (Exodus 31:15-17, 20:9-11). For more discussion on the Sabbath and its implications, see the Gospel lesson for the 10th Sunday of Luke.

The Psalm begins: “The Lord reigns. He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength” (v.1). On the sixth day of Creation, it was the Son of God doing the creating (Hebrews 1:2, 1:8-10) and thus He was clothed with majesty and strength. At His baptism in the flesh at His Epiphany, however, we see Him clothed much differently. Now He has clothed Himself with flesh, made Himself of no reputation, taken the form of a bondservant and come in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7). For more details of this, see Hippolytus’ comments in the section titled “John Baptized Jesus”.

Psalm 93 reminds us Who it is that was being baptized by John: “Surely the world is established so that it cannot be shaken. Your throne is established from of old; from everlasting You are” (vv.1, 2). “The Lord on high is mighty. Your testimonies are very sure; holiness adorns Your house, O Lord, forever” (vv.4, 5).

The Psalm continues to say that the rivers have lifted up their voices and their pounding more than the voices of many waters and the mighty breakers of the sea (vv.4, 5). The question we might ask here is when have rivers done this? From Psalm 46, we read: “There is a river whose streams make glad the City of God” (Psalm 46:4). Another river is related to this one. Jesus referred to this river when He stood up on the great day of the Feast (i.e. on the 8th day of the Feast of Tabernacles): “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-39). Augustine of Hippo (4th Century) stated that it is this river of living water that Psalm 93 is referring to. The lifting up of the voices of this river is the preaching of the Gospel by those filled with the living water (which is the Holy Spirit). When Christ had begun to be preached by so powerful voices, the sea became enraged and persecutions began to thicken. But the voice and the pounding of the living waters were more than the mighty breakers of the sea (Exposition on Psalm 93, 6).