

## CHRISTMAS AND EPIPHANY PACKET

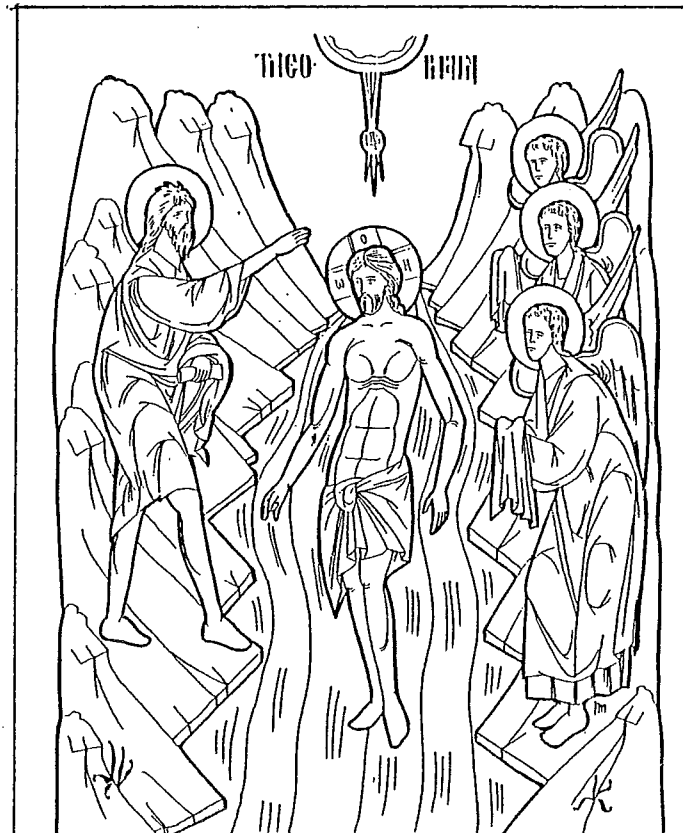
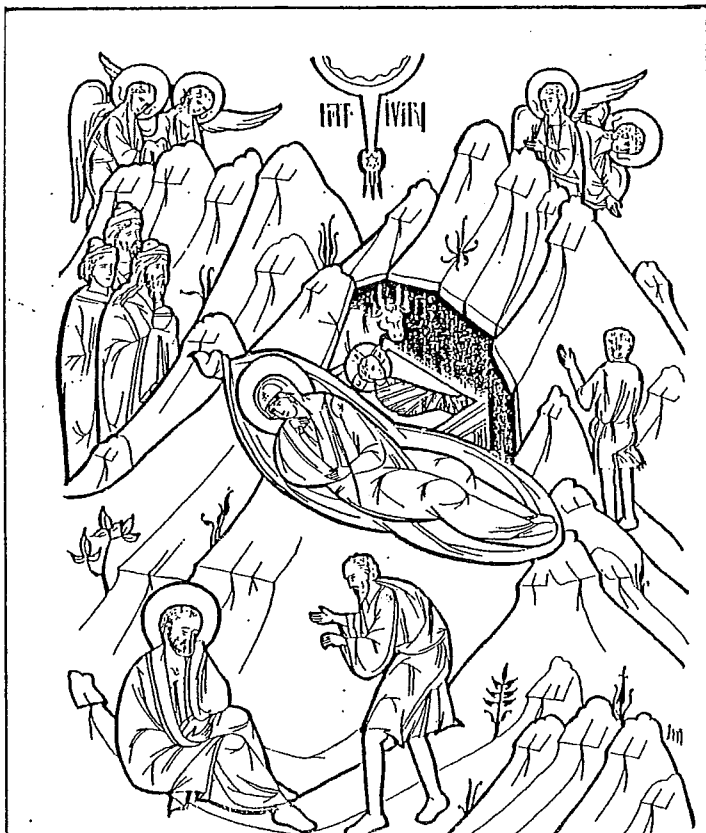
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## I - INTRODUCTION

After the opening of gifts on Christmas Day the celebration of the Birth of the Savior of the world goes into a stall. But the Church sees these days after Christ's Birthday as a time to heighten the spirit of Christmas.

The packet that follows is designed to do just that. It is centered on the reading of the scriptures and the saints we remember during this time of year.

"The lives of the Saints are like lamps lit by the Holy Spirit to guide us along the path of life. From the lives of the Saints, we find out what is truly valuable in life, and what is worth struggling for. We also learn what is useless or harmful and how to avoid it. As children of Christ, we should learn the lives of God's Saints and let them be joy for our hearts, lamps for our eyes, teachers for our minds and sure guides for our souls. If we will follow the path which is lit by these lives, we will find that it leads to Christ - to the Heavenly Kingdom."  
(Lives of the Saints for Young People)

It also is set-up to help us see the Light that came into the world through the lighting of candles. It will encourage us to be ever-giving by the giving of small gifts. And it will help us to be thankful for all the great things God did for us through His Birth and Baptism.

Therefore, review the packet thoroughly and get prepared with all the appropriate materials. Do what is applicable for your family or household. Remember we are about celebrating with joy and thanksgiving the Birth and Baptism of our Lord.

This packet can be used with a family or individually as a devotional time. Thus use the readings, the lighting of candles and other activities to fit your situation.

## II - CHRISTMAS AND EPIPHANY

### A. Christmas

The celebration of Christmas on December 25 is not evident in the Church until the mid to late fourth century. It likely was celebrated on that day first in Rome around 354 A.D. Prior to that time, the Birth of the Lord was included in one great feast celebrating the manifestation of God in the flesh known as Epiphany. The original celebration, which corresponded to the Jewish "Feast of Lights" included the commemoration of Christ's Birth, Circumcision, Presentation in the Temple, and Baptism. The word "Epiphany" (or "Theophany") means "the shining forth or manifestation of God."

The probable reason for shifting the celebration of the Birth of the Lord to December 25 was that the Roman winter solstice holiday called the Feast of the Invincible Sun was celebrated on that day. The Church overtook this pagan feast by proclaiming Jesus Christ as the only Invincible One, the Sun of Justice. Consequently, other dates were either adjusted or set to correspond with this date celebrating the Birth of the Lord. The Circumcision of the Lord (also called the Holy Name) is celebrated on January 1, eight days after the Birth. The Presentation of the Lord in the Temple is celebrated 40 days after the Birth on February 2. The Annunciation, which celebrates the Lord's conception falls on March 25, nine months before the Birth. The Birth of St. John the Baptist is celebrated on June 24, six months before the Birth of the Lord.

Christmas Day is followed by the POST-FEAST of Christmas (Dec. 26-Jan. 1). The Church sets aside this time to specifically remember and celebrate the birth of our Lord, giving each of us an opportunity to bring the joy of this season more fully into our lives and our homes. We are even encouraged to exchange this greeting: "Christ is Born! Glorify Him!" The Christmas Day service may be over, but our celebration will continue.

On December 31st there is a shift in the emphasis of this celebration for we now begin to anticipate the coming of Epiphany. This is a good time (Jan. 1st or 2nd) to take down the Christmas tree and put away all the trimmings. In its place can go the EPIPHANY TABLE (see Activities) to help the family visualize this transition.

## B. Epiphany

When the twelfth day of the Christmas season concludes on January 5, the joy of the celebration of the Savior's birth assumes another dimension with the celebration on January 6 of the day known as Epiphany to all Christendom but more properly referred to in the Orthodox Church as Theophany. Epiphany means manifestation or appearance in Greek, but Theophany is more specific because it is the Greek word for the appearance of God. It declares in one word not only the appearance of the Savior but His divinity as well.

In the Orthodox Church the day of Epiphany ranks with Easter and Pentecost as the highest of the sacred celebrations of Christianity. All three of which seem to command greater attention than Christmas Day in Orthodoxy without detracting from the degree of reverence evidenced on the anniversary of the Savior's birth. This is due in part for the reason that although the birth of Jesus Christ was heralded and chronicled, it was on the day that He was baptized that a voice from heaven was heard to say: "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). As a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, a Heaven-sent white dove alit on the shoulder of the Messiah, revealing God in three persons: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, the only salvation for mankind. The Trinity becomes a vibrant and inspiring reality on Theophany.

Let streams of tears exhaust our eyes,  
Let us cleanse the filth of our souls, O believers!  
We shall see Christ,  
The Light from the Three-fold Light,  
Coming to be baptized.  
The Father will bear witness from heaven,  
And the Holy Spirit will come in the form of a  
shining dove.

When You, O Lord, were baptized in the Jordan,  
The worship of the Trinity was made manifest.  
For the voice of the Father bare witness to You,  
And called You His beloved Son.  
And the Spirit, in the form of a dove,  
Confirmed the truthfulness of His word.  
O Christ our God, who has revealed Yourself  
And has enlightened the world,  
Glory to You!

The baptism of Jesus Christ would have been a challenge for the brush and canvas of an artist had God seen fit to have placed it in the midst of multitudes rather than whatever scattered few

happened to be in the neighborhood. That is not the way of the Lord, however, and so, almost unnoticed, the greatest single event in the history of man is celebrated on January 6, a day that lives in glory. Such was the impact of the humble Carpenter that in three short years of public presence He did what all the kings and heroes of history together could not do. He split history in two, and all the civilized world marks its days from before and after He was born.

### C. The Great Blessing of the Waters

This service begins with the singing of special hymns and the censuring of the water which is placed in the church, surrounded by flowers and candles. This water stands for the beautiful world of God's original creation and the ultimate glorification by Christ in the Kingdom of God.

It tells us that man and the world were created and saved in order to be "filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 1:22).

It tells us that Christ in whom "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" is and shall be truly "all, and in all." (Col. 2:9, 3:11)

It tells us that the "new heavens and the new earth" which God promised through His prophets and apostles (Isaiah 66:22, 2 Peter 3:13, Rev. 21:1) are truly with us already in the mystery of Christ and His Church. (Hopko, Worship)

### D. The Use of Holy Water

One may ask why the water is drunk by the people at Epiphany. The meaning is revealed in the prayers of the service itself:

"Therefore, O King who loves mankind, be present now as when through the descent of Your Holy Spirit and sanctify this water and confer upon it the grace of redemption, the blessing of Jordan. Make it a source of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a remission of sins, a protection against disease, a destruction to demons, inaccessible to the adverse powers and filled with angelic strength: that all who draw from it and partake of it may have it for the cleansing of their soul and body, for the healing of their passions, for the sanctification of their dwellings, and for every purpose that is expedient."

We believe that bread and wine offered to God in the

Eucharist is given back to us as the Body and Blood of the Lord for the remission of sins and eternal life, and we can believe that water offered to God at Epiphany is given back to us for the cleansing of soul and body, for the healing of the passions, for the sanctification of our dwellings, and for every purpose that is expedient!

### The Preparation for House Blessings

For four days, the Church prepares for Christ's baptism by John in the Jordan. As Christ came to bless and sanctify the waters of the Jordan river and, through them, all of creation, so in this feast will we be blessed by the water that we take from the church to our homes. In the few days that we have to get ready, we must prepare ourselves and our homes to welcome Christ. Now is the time to clean our rooms, to bring out the icon of the Baptism of Christ, and to prepare a special place for the icon and the water that will be used to bless the house (Epiphany Table). (\*or a special family icon)

The verses sung in church on these days help us to look forward to this next feast. They remind us of the joy of the Christmas celebration and tell us that the celebration of Theophany will be even greater. See how the Church compares these two celebrations in this text: (read across both columns).

#### Christmas

#### Theophany

The past feast was joyous	but the coming joy is greater yet!
That had the angel proclaiming glad tidings,	but this has the Forerunner pre- paring the way.
That had blood spilt, as Beth- lehem wailed in childlessness,	but this has water giving birth to many sons.
Then the star proclaimed Thee to the Wise Men,	but now the Father reveals Thee to the whole universe.
O Incarnate Lord, coming and revealing,	glory to Thee!

Other verses of these days tell the Jordan river and all of creation to get ready as Christ comes "to renew the whole creation!"

Prepare, O river Jordan  
Behold, Christ is coming to be baptized  
by John in the Jordan!  
Rejoice, O baren wilderness!  
Dance in gladness, you hills and mountains!  
Eternal life is coming to reclaim Adam!  
Forerunner, call out with the voice of one crying:  
"Prepare the ways of the Lord! Make straight His paths!"

F. - FASTING

From December 25th through January 4th there is no fasting. We are celebrating the birth of Jesus. Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

On January 5th, after noon, a Eucharist fast should be observed and broken after the Great Blessing of the Waters that evening.

### III. DAILY READINGS

#### December 25 - The Magi (Wisemen) and Shepherds

Ss. Melchior, Gaspar and Balthazar  
The Shepherds in Bethlehem who went to see the Lord

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:1-20 and Matthew 2:1-11

Today we remember two groups of Saints: the Shepherds and the Wise Men. The Shepherds are remembered, among other things, for their willingness to journey from the fields into Bethlehem and search for Jesus. This implies effort. We must be willing to make an effort, both physically and spiritually, to see and to be with our God. As Psalm 121 says; "... to the hills from whence comes my help." In addition to identifying with the effort of the Shepherds, we can identify with the people who listened to what the Shepherds revealed; because, we too depend upon others to share with us the things concerning Jesus.

God will guide those willing to make an effort just as the star guided the Wise Men. The Wise Men are remembered on this day for faithfully following the light that God had placed in the sky to show them where Jesus was. In verse eleven in the second chapter of Matthew, notice how the Wise Men responded when they finally found Jesus. They gave of the most precious things that they had. The three gifts mentioned in the scripture represent many things to us. For example, gold reminds us that Jesus is King over all. Incense is a sign of adoration, praise and worship, for He is God. Myrrh is an expensive spice that will be used when Jesus is buried. It reminds us that He came to die for us.

#### Activities

- 1) Prepare Epiphany Box or Stocking with twelve gifts (see Activities)
- 2) Lighting of Christ Candle in Advent wreath (see Activities)
- 3) Light first candle in honor of the Magi and Shepherds (see Activities)

#### December 26 - The Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:45-55 and John 1:1-5

The mother of God has a special place in the one true faith. We reach out with our hearts and minds in order to grasp the meaning of this event. What is the focus of this synaxis? The words canted by the choir during vespers gives the answer:



"How can I describe the great mystery  
He who has no flesh becomes incarnate  
The bodiless Word is clothed in matter  
The invisible is seen: The untouchable is felt  
He who has no beginning, begins  
The Son of God becomes the Son of Man  
Jesus Christ; The same yesterday, today and forever"

How can we describe the great mystery? To reveal Christ as God and man, we must see Father and mother. Today we look upon His mother. There is no better way to proclaim "the great mystery" - God made flesh - than to meet His virgin mother.

He who was begotten before the morning star  
without mother of the Father,  
today is made flesh from you without a father.  
A star announcing the glad tidings to the wise men  
while angels and shepherds sing the praises of your  
most pure child bearing,  
O lady full of grace:

#### Activities

- 1) Light candle(s)
- 2) Open gift

#### December 27 - St. Stephen the Archdeacon and First Martyr

SCRIPTURE: Acts 6:1-15 and Acts 7:54-60

(If possible reading Acts 6 and 7 in total gives a wonderful account of Christ fulfilling the Old Testament and initiating a New Covenant)

The sufferings of the martyrs "complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His body, that is the Church" (Col. 1:24) This is certainly true in the case of Saint Stephen.

On December 27th in the Orthodox Church we honor the first Christian to give his life for Christ. Stephen was one of the seven Deacons of the first Church of Christ in Jerusalem. These seven Deacons were appointed by the Apostles to assist the elderly and the sick during Communion Services and evening Vespers. It was also their responsibility to see to it that the people were given proper attention during the community suppers. The names of the seven Deacons are as follows: Stephen, Phillip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicholas.

Stephen was the student of the great Jewish scholar, Gamaliel, who was a teacher of laws and one of the most prominent Pharisees of Jerusalem. St. Stephen became a follower of Christ at a very young age. He preached the message of salvation with great enthusiasm and Christian courage. This invariably caused the anger of those who were jealous of Christ and His Apostles. The mobs of the synagogue seized Stephen as he spoke at the synagogue and brought him outside the gates of Jerusalem where he was stoned to death. Tradition tells us that Paul, who was an enemy of Christianity before he was converted on the road to Damascus, was present at the stoning of Stephen. In fact, tradition tells us that St. Paul had held the garments of some of those who were engaged in stoning the blessed St. Stephen. After his death, members of the Christian Church of Jerusalem took his body and buried it in a little chapel outside the walls of Jerusalem which bears his name. This chapel was the first Christian Chapel built after Christ preached in the Holy Land. Again tradition tells us that the death of Stephen occurred three years after the death, Resurrection and Ascension of our Blessed Lord. The title given to Stephen is Protomartyr, which means the first martyr -- the first person to give his life for Christ. St Stephen was called a martyr because he refused to give up his faith in Christ. (from Lives of The Saints and Major Feast Days)

#### Activities

- 1) Light candle(s)
- 2) Open gift

#### December 28 - The Martyrs of Nicomedia

SCRIPTURE: Col. 1:24-27 and Heb. 11:37 - 12:2

The third day of Christmas is dedicated to the memory of the holy martyrs of Nicomedia who refused to honor the earthly emperor as king. According to the ancient Christian saying, their blood has become the seed of the Church. Their story is recorded as follows:

"At Nicomedia the passion of many thousands of martyrs, who came together for the Lord's service on Christ's birthday. The Emperor Diocletian ordered the doors of the church to be shut and fire to be made ready round about it and a tripod with incense to be set before the door; and then that a herald should proclaim so that he could be heard that they who wished to escape the fire should come outside and offer incense to Jupiter. And when they all with one voice declared that they were ready to die for Christ's sake, the fire was kindled and

they were consumed therein. And so they merited to be born in Heaven on that very day whereon Christ for the world's salvation was pleased to be born on earth."

The Kontakion of the feast of the Holy Martyrs:

The army of 20,000 Martyrs honored by us shines like a star in the sky of the Church, enlightening with faith the hearts and minds of the faithful. For these gallant men and women were aflame with divine love for the Lord and cheerfully received through the fire a holy and happy ending to their lives.

Sometimes a few words are worth a thousand pictures. "Like a star shining brightly in the sky of the Church", the 20,000 martyrs are a beacon blazing brightly that our life in Christ is no longer like "a wisp of smoke", but ETERNAL.

#### Activities

- 1) Light candle(s)
- 2) Open gift

#### December 29 - The Holy Innocents

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 2:13-23.

Today the Church celebrates the memory of the first Christian martyrs, the 14,000 innocent children (2 yrs. old and younger) killed by King Herod. These young infants were ordered slain by the wicked king because he was afraid that the Baby Jesus would eventually take over his throne in Judea.

So from the very beginning Jesus was rejected on earth. He was hunted by Herod and eventually caught by Pilot. But by His power and might He overcame all for our salvation.

But what of the children who died at Herod's jealous and angry hand? We can rejoice that they who suffered unjustly will receive a great reward for ending their lives in Christ's stead. As St. John Chrysostom states: The innocent ones were taken to a "waveless harbor."

#### Activities

- 1) Light candle(s)
- 2) Open gift
- 3) Banner (see activities)

December 30 - St. Timon the Deacon

SCRIPTURE: Acts 6:1-7

Today we remember Saint Timon one of the first men to be chosen to serve as a deacon in the Church. The stories concerning his life are conflicting, but we do know from scripture that he was a greek-speaking Jew and highly regarded by his fellow Christians. He was said to be full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom. He is numbered among the Seventy Apostles who journeyed from Jerusalem to preach the Gospel. In I Timothy 3:3-13 can be found a list of qualifications for the office of Deacon: sobriety, straightforwardness, freedom from excess and greed, and honesty. St. Timon and the other six men were chosen by prayer and commissioned by the laying-on of hands. Part of his job description was to help with the domestic and financial administration of the church as well as evangelistic work.

The term deacon is a label for one of the orders of the Church, but it can also be applied to all Christians. Obeying the greatest commandment to love God and our neighbor as ourself requires a deacon-like attitude; the willingness to serve. In response to this Christmas season we can reflect on the life of a deacon like St. Timon and prepare our hearts to serve the Lord.

Activities

- 1) Light candle(s)
- 2) Open gift

December 31 - St. Zoticos, The Protector of Orphans

SCRIPTURE: Luke 9:1-2 and James 5:13-16

The last day of the Christian year, December 31st is dedicated to a most amazing young man. His name was Zoticos and he held the title of Chief Magistrate in the court of King Constantine during the year 330 A.D. When Constantine decided to build a "new Rome" he brought to Constantinople (formerly Byzantium) on the shores of the Bosporos, many trusted friends to assist him in governing the new city. One of these devoted friends was Zoticos.

In the year 331 A.D. a terrible plague ravaged the city. The disease attacked the nervous system and eventually led to

leprosy and the decay of the bone structure of the body. It was a deadly disease and thousands died each week. The only way in which the disease could be contained at that time was to cast all afflicted persons into the Bosporos to be drowned. It was a cruel thing to do to be sure, but in those days no cure was available.

The chairman of the Board of Health for the city of Constantinople was given full authority to carry out the terrible fate of all those afflicted with the disease. Zoticos was deeply moved by the turn of events and finally asked Constantine for large sums of money with which to purchase priceless gems. Constantine gave him the money without questions about what he meant or what he was doing. Zoticos took the money, bribed the executioners and led all the afflicted men, women and children out of the city of Constantinople into the hills nearby. Here he erected hundreds of tents and cared for the unfortunate victims of the plague rather than have them cast into the sea. Constantine became aware what Zoticos was doing but said nothing. Eventually, Constantine died and his son, Constantius ascended the throne of the Byzantine Empire. Constantius was not very sympathetic to the efforts of Zoticos but nevertheless respected him very much.

One day the daughter of the Emperor Constantius was stricken with the deadly disease, and she was ordered to be cast into the sea with the others. Again Zoticos bribed the soldiers and took the daughter of Constantius and others to his hide-away outside the city walls. Rumors were being spread by the enemies of Zoticos that he was responsible for the lack of funds in the city treasury, and as Chief Magistrate he alone was responsible. The emperor questioned Zoticos about the money his father Constantine had given him to buy precious gems. Zoticos told Constantius that he would show him the gems. He led him outside the city walls to his "hide-away" and showed him all of those he had saved from certain death, including his own daughter. Constantius became enraged at what Zoticos had done and ordered his immediate execution. Zoticos was cast down the mountain from where his retreat for the afflicted was located, and his body was smashed to pieces on the rocks below. Constantius soon repented for his actions and prayed for forgiveness. He ordered a chapel to be built at the spot where Zoticos suffered martyrdom. Tradition also tells us that at that exact spot where Zoticos died, there sprang forth a well whose waters brought about many healings and miracles. The same spot is still located outside the city of Constantinople, where a hospital and orphanage is located. Since Zoticos saved many children from certain death, he is known as the "orphanotrophos" which means protector of the orphans.  
(from Lives of The Saints and Major Feast Days)

## Activities

- 1) Light candle(s)
- 2) Open gift

## January 1 - The Circumcision of The Lord Jesus Christ and St. Basil the Great

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:21 and Romans 2:25-29

On the eighth day of the feast of the Nativity, which also happens to be the first day of the civil new year, the Church celebrates the Lord's circumcision and His receiving the name Jesus, which means Savior.

According to the Church's liturgy, the Lord underwent circumcision in order to fulfill the law of Moses, which no one had been able to fulfill before. In performing "everything according to the law" (Lk 2:39), the Messiah finds it fitting "to fulfill all righteousness" (Mt 3:15). In this sense He is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets; not only by doing what was written of Him, but also by doing all things that everyone should do if they truly fulfilled the Word of God.

The God of all goodness  
Did not disdain to be circumcised.  
He offered Himself as a saving sign  
And example for us all.  
He fulfilled the words of the prophets concerning Himself.  
He holds the world in His hands,  
Yet is bound in swaddling clothes.  
Let us glorify Him!

In performing everything exactly according to the law, the Lord shows that He has come to be a servant, and to identify Himself completely with His sinful creatures. This is God's divine humility, His exceedingly great lovingkindness and compassion, His ineffable and unspeakable humiliation and condescension to us who are lost. For He not only is found "in the likeness of men," but He empties Himself of His divine glory and takes on the "form of a slave" (Phil 2:7-8), He submits to the high priest's knife, enduring the sign of complete submission to God, the act which expresses the total helplessness and weakness of unholy creatures before their Holy Creator. Words cannot convey the condescension of the Lord in His willingness to be circumcised. It is an act of self-emptying humiliation which is wholly ineffable. (Hopko, Winter Pascha)

## St. Basil the Great

The Christian Community of the fourth century, struggling for survival against vast odds, found renewed hope and inspiration in the noble efforts of a family of six children, all of whom became saints of the Church. From this remarkable Christian family came St. Basil the Great, a spiritual giant.

Many men in history have had the superlative 'great' added to their names primarily because they were monarchs such as Alexander the Great whose exploits spanned large land masses. St. Basil, however, earned this title for reaching the masses with the word of Christ. He was not a king, but he won the hearts of his fellowmen for service to the King of Kings. The title 'Great' was no more richly deserved by any man in history, for he possessed the humility of Moses, the Zeal of Elijah, the faith of Peter, the eloquence of John the Theologian, and the dedication of Paul. St. Basil's brothers and sisters, priests, bishops, and nuns served under his leadership as true workers in the vineyard of Christ.

### Activities

- 1) Light candle(s)
- 2) Open gift
- 3) Tree down
- 4) Make crosses (see activities)
- 5) Epiphany Table up (see activities)

### January 2 - St. Sylvester, Bishop of Rome

SCRIPTURE: II Peter 1:1-11

St. Sylvester grew up with a true love for God and as an adult liked to receive travelers into his home and serve them. He would wash their feet, just as Christ washed the feet of the Apostles.

St. Sylvester also spent much time in prayer and fasting. He was a great struggler against sin and temptation, and recognized for his great love and holiness by the Christians of Rome. When the old bishop died, the people elected St. Sylvester to be their new bishop.

At that time, many of the pagans of Rome were serpent worshippers. A huge poisonous serpent was kept in a cavern near Rome. People, especially children, were sacrificed to this serpent.

These people were worshippers of the devil and the snake itself was guided by a demon.

St. Sylvester did not want to see these people enslaved to the devil. So he decided that, with God's help, he would destroy this serpent. The holy bishop asked all the Christian people in Rome to fast and pray for three days and three nights. He fasted and prayed more than anyone else.

During the night, the Holy Apostle Peter appeared to Saint Sylvester. Apostle Peter told the holy bishop how to destroy the serpent. "Take some of the priests and deacons to the cave," St. Peter said, "and hold a church service there. Then, call on the name of the Lord and seal up the room where the serpent is kept."

St. Sylvester obeyed. The pagans did not try to stop the bishop and priests' from entering the cave, for they thought that the serpent would destroy them. St. Sylvester served the church service and went into the serpent's room. He made the sign of the Cross, calling upon the name of Jesus Christ, and the serpent fell dead. After that, the Saint sealed up the cave. When the pagans saw this, many of them, believed in Christ and were baptized into the Church.

St. Sylvester continued to run the Church of Rome with love and kindness. He remained a defender of the faith and performed many miracles to the glory of God.

Later in life he made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. When he returned to Rome, he peacefully departed this life. May this kind and loving Bishop be an example for us all.

#### Activities

- 1) Light candle(s)
- 2) Open gift

#### January 3 - The Prophet Malachi

SCRIPTURE: Malachi 3:1-12

The name Malachi translates to mean 'messenger', one sent by the Lord to speak for Him, and therefore, as a spokesman of the Almighty, belongs in everyone's 'who's who', with the thought expressed elsewhere that "the first shall be last, and the last shall be first." Malachi appeared in the year 450 B.C., when the land of Israel was under the domination of the Persians and needed a spiritual revival, not so much because they were oppressed but because they were far afield of the Ten Commandments received by Moses from God.



The nation of Malachi had sunk to the depths of immorality when he came forward to deplore the sins in which they were wallowing. He was of necessity a fire and brimstone preacher whose duty it was to threaten with the wrath of God those who had lost complete sight of religious teaching. It is incredible to what degradation the people had descended, seemingly forsaking the ways of God altogether and committing acts which even in those days of permissiveness would result in imprisonment for an entire population. When Malachi raised his voice in protest, he did so with ample reason and worked tirelessly to eliminate the insensitivity to moral law that ravaged an entire land. A list of sins being committed would comprise a list of everything punishable by any civilized nation, let alone a nation which was descended from those claiming to be chosen of God.

With the dedication of a true man of God, the prophet Malachi first denounced the spiritual leaders who had abandoned their duty in the face of the raging river of sin, leaving them to drown in a maelstrom of their own making, while priests offered token services to keep themselves above the torrent. He then went about the country, exhorting his people to abandon their sinful ways and to return to their religious heritage.

Malachi writes of the coming of the Messiah in the first verse of chapter three, saying, "Behold I will send my messenger, and He shall prepare the way before me." The reference is to St. John the Baptist, the forerunner and prefiguration of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

#### Activities

- 1) Light candle(s)
- 2) Open gift

#### January 4 - The Synaxis of the Seventy Apostles

SCRIPTURE: Luke 10:1-12

Today we remember the Seventy Apostles appointed by the Lord to go out into the world and proclaim the Gospel of Christ. It is fitting that we remember the Seventy at this time of preparation for Epiphany. For we are preparing to celebrate an aspect of the good news that the Seventy proclaimed. That is that because the Son of God took human flesh and was baptized in the Jordan all matter is sanctified and made pure in Him. The world was corrupted by the devil in the Fall, but now in the Lord's Epiphany all creation becomes good again. On this Feast, the priest consecrates the waters the prime element of the creation, and thus sanctification is possible. For it is the

vocation and destiny of man and the world to be filled with the fullness of God. May we anticipate the Feast of Epiphany with joy -- the joy of the apostles proclaiming the good news of the manifestation of Christ.

#### Activities

- 1) Light candle(s)
- 2) Open gift

#### January 5 - The Hieromartyr Theopemptus and the Holy Martyr Theonas

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 1:27-2:4

When the Emperor Diocletian gave orders for the persecution of Christians, Theopemptus, Bishop of Nicomedia, was the first to suffer for Christ. He was brought before the Emperor, who threatened him with death if he did not deny Christ. To that threat, the courageous bishop replied: 'It is written: "Fear not those who are able to kill the soul". You, O King, have power over my body. Do with it whatever you will!' He was cruelly beaten and starved, and tortured in many ways. Finally the Emperor called in a magician, Theonas, to trick the man of God in some way with magic. Theonas dissolved a very strong poison in water and gave it to Theopemptus to drink. Theopemptus made the sign of the Cross over the cup and drank the poison. Theonas, seeing that it had no effect on Theopemptus, turned to the Emperor and cried out: 'I too am a Christian, and worship the Crucified!' They were both condemned to death; Theopemptus was slain with the sword and Theonas buried alive in the year 298. They suffered with honour and became citizens of the Kingdom of Christ.

#### Activities:

1. Light candles
2. Open gift
3. Read about Epiphany, the Great Blessing of the Water and the use of Holy Water (see Section II)

#### January 6 - Epiphany

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 3:13-17

The word "epiphany" means "manifestation" or "appearance." It is used for the event of Christ's baptism because it was in the Jordan, being baptized by John the Forerunner, that Jesus appeared to the world and manifested Himself as the Messiah, the Son of God, one of the Holy Trinity.

The Lord's first public appearance takes place at His baptism when He was thirty years old. This was preceded by St. John the Baptist who was preaching and baptizing many preparing the way for Jesus. When John saw Jesus, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

Now John felt that Jesus should baptize him, but Christ wanted to show people what they had to do to return to inherit the Kingdom, and so He submitted to baptism by John.

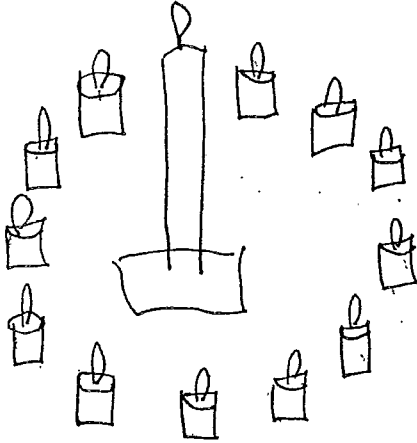
Then a miracle happened for all to see! The Holy Spirit descended like a dove upon Jesus and a voice from heaven called out: "This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." At this wonderful moment the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were revealed to man - Glory to the Blessed Trinity!

#### Activities

- 1) Light candles
- 2) Open last gift
- 3) Read information about Epiphany (section II, B)
- 4) Prepare for House Blessing (section II, E)

## IV - ACTIVITIES

### 1. The Lighting of Candles

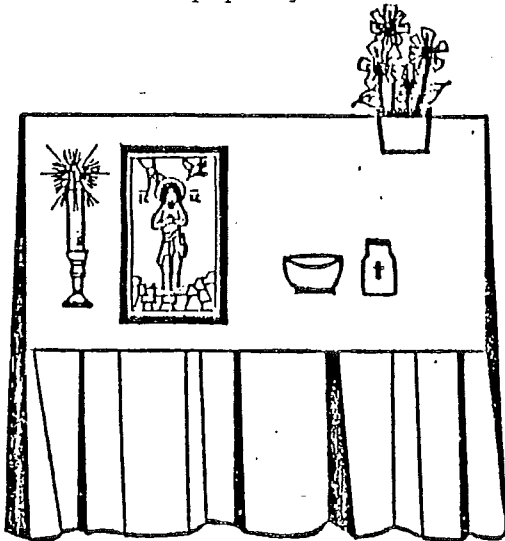


Take the Christ candle from the Advent Wreath or get another central candle. Each evening when the Saint and scripture are being read, begin by lighting the main candle and adding a small votive candle for each day. This way on Epiphany you will have 12 candles surrounding your main Christ candle. You can set this up any way you would like - **BE CREATIVE:** design a special wreath or decorative set-up for the candles.

### 2. The Giving of Gifts

This is an absolute favorite! Buy 12 small gifts (such as candy bars, new toothbrush, socks, pencils, pens, etc. - stocking stuffer-type presents). Wrap each gift and place it in the Christmas stocking or in a special box. Then each day during the Christmas season, one gift can be opened when the Saint and scripture are being read. Everyone can participate in this activity. The children can give special favors each day to Mom and Dad (ie, take out trash, pick-up the yard, help with laundry). Each family and household will be different, but the focus during this season is that of giving and thanksgiving.

### 3. The Epiphany Table

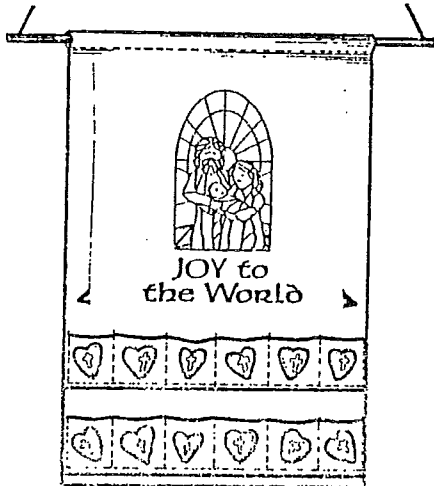


When the tree goes down the Epiphany Table goes up. This affords a great transition from Advent into Christmas and Epiphany. On the table place a white cloth, an Icon of the Baptism of Christ, a candle (the candle(s) you are using for the readings), Holy Water container, and decorate with fresh greens. The tree should come down around January 1st or 2nd to help establish the changing of the Season. If possible, keep table up until you house is blessed.

#### 4. Making of Crosses

When the tree is taken down each family member or selected members can make a cross out of the branches. They can be placed on the Epiphany Table and later hung in the room, reminding us that the one who was baptized for us in the Jordan River would also die for us on the cross.

#### 5. Banner



This is a great opportunity to make a banner proclaiming the joy of the season. Use themes such as: Joy to the World; Christ is Born, Glorify Him; The Lord has Come. Place this on a stick, then attach string or yarn to the stick and hang it up (maybe next to the Epiphany table).

#### 6. Candle Making

If you enjoy this and are equipped, candle making can be a lot of fun. It is the time of the year when candles help us celebrate the Light that has come into the world. You can make candles for the Epiphany Table, using them for the remembrances of the Saints.

#### 7. Thank you Notes

The evening reading can also be accompanied by writing of a few thank you notes for Christmas gifts. This gets accomplished a sometimes forgotten task and helps encourage a thankful spirit.