

**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**

**Epiphany**  
**January 6, 2021**  
**Revision D**

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

Epiphany is celebrated on January 6<sup>th</sup> and the Feast Day of John the Baptist is celebrated on January 7<sup>th</sup>. 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. See the 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.

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The Feast of the Epiphany originated in the Eastern Church and was introduced to the West in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century. In its early usage, it ranked with Pascha 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 Christ's 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<sup>1</sup>.

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 below. "Royal Hours" are also observed in the Orthodox Church for Good Friday and Christmas Eve. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Cross, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 465.

## Royal Hours Readings

	EPIPHANY EVE	CHRISTMAS EVE	GOOD FRIDAY
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Hour: 6:00 a.m.</b>	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
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Hour: 9:00 a.m.</b>	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
<b>6<sup>th</sup> Hour: 12:00 p.m.</b>	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
<b>9<sup>th</sup> Hour: 3:00 p.m.</b>	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
<b>Vespers: 6:00 p.m.</b>	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

Revision E

## Epistle: 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 foot-soldiers (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 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<sup>2</sup>, 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 loosen. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16).

Hippolytus, referring<sup>3</sup> 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 loosened 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

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<sup>2</sup> Nikolai Velimirovic, Prologue of Ochrid, Sept. 10

<sup>3</sup> Hippolytus, Discourse on Theophany, 3

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”.

### **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” (John 3:29). “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

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” (John 3:31-34). 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<sup>4</sup>. 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

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<sup>4</sup> Nikolai Velimirovic, Prologue of Ochrid, April 30.

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).

Basil the Great taught<sup>5</sup> that there are some who have needed none of the outward signs of water for their salvation, because they were baptized in their own blood. Some heretics do not agree with this, and actually exalt themselves against the Holy Spirit.

"Through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to paradise, our ascension into the kingdom of heaven, our return to the adoption of sons, our liberty to call God our Father. Also, we are being made partakers of the grace of Christ, called children of light, share in eternal glory, and, in a word, brought into a state of all 'fullness of blessing' (Romans 15:29), both in this world and in the world to come. Of all the good gifts that are in store for us, by promise, through faith, we behold the reflection of their grace as though they were already present, and we await the full enjoyment. If such is the down payment, what the perfection? If such the first fruits, what the complete fulfillment? Furthermore, from this too may be apprehended the difference between the grace that comes from the Spirit and the baptism by water. John indeed baptized with water, but our Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. 'I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire' (Matthew 3:11). Here He calls the trial at the judgment the baptism of fire. As Paul says, 'Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is' (1 Corinthians 3:13). Prior to now, there have been some who in their championship of the true Faith have undergone the death for Christ's sake, not in mere similitude, but in actual fact. These have needed none of the outward signs of water for their salvation, because they were baptized in their own blood. Thus, I write not to disparage the baptism by water, but to overthrow the arguments (2 Corinthians 10:4) of those who exalt themselves against the Spirit; who confound things that are distinct from one another, and compare those which admit of no comparison."

Cyril of Jerusalem stated<sup>6</sup> that the martyrs are saved even if they have not been baptized in water. Christ Himself set the example for them when He was baptized in His own blood at His crucifixion.

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<sup>5</sup> Basil the Great, On the Spirit, XV, 36.

<sup>6</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, III, 10.



“If any man does not receive Baptism, he does not have salvation; except only Martyrs, who even without the water receive the kingdom. For when the Savior, in redeeming the world by His Cross, was pierced in the side, He shed forth blood and water; that men, living in times of peace, might be baptized in water, and, in times of persecution, in their own blood. For martyrdom also the Savior tends to call a baptism, saying, ‘Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’ (Mark 10:38) And the Martyrs confess, ‘as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men’” (1 Corinthians 4:9).

Tertullian of Carthage pointed out<sup>7</sup> that young children have been baptized in their own blood, such as the 14,000 children two years old and younger who were killed by Herod the Great when he was trying to kill Christ. Tertullian advises us to pay attention to Christ’s words to be wise as serpents but harmless as doves.

“We are branded by the heathen as simple, and as being merely so, without being wise also; as if indeed wisdom were compelled to be lacking in simplicity. Whereas the Lord unites them both: ‘Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves’ (Matthew 10:16). Now if we are accounted foolish because we are simple, does it then follow that the heathen are not simple because they are wise? Most perverse, however, are they who are not simple, even as they are most foolish who are not wise. And yet, (if I must choose) I should prefer being wise *as* the lesser fault; since it is perhaps better to have a wisdom which falls short in quantity, than that which is bad in quality — better to be in error than to mislead. Besides, the face of the Lord is patiently waited for by those who ‘seek Him in simplicity of heart’ (Wisdom 1:1). Then, again, infants have borne by their blood a testimony to Christ (Matthew 2:16). Would you say that it was children who shouted ‘Crucify Him’ (Mark 15:13-14)? They were neither children nor infants; in other words, they were not simple. Paul, too, bids us to ‘become children again’ towards God, ‘to be as children in malice’ by our simplicity, yet as being also ‘wise in our practical faculties’ (1 Corinthians 14:20). At the same time, with respect to the order of development in Wisdom, I have admitted that it flows from simplicity. In brief, ‘the dove’ has usually served to figure Christ (Genesis 8:8-11); ‘the serpent’, to tempt Him (Genesis 3:1-7). The dove even from the first has been the harbinger of divine peace; the serpent from the beginning has been the despoiler of the divine image. Accordingly, simplicity alone will be more easily able to know and to declare God, *whereas* wisdom alone will rather do Him violence, and betray Him.”

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<sup>7</sup> Tertullian of Carthage, Against the Valentinians, II, iv, 2.

## **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 bottles<sup>8</sup> 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.

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<sup>8</sup> G. Christian Weiss, Insight into Bible Times and Customs, Good News Broadcasting Association, Lincoln NE, 1972, p. 90.

# The Legacy of John the Baptist's Baptism

Revision A

## Epistle: Acts 19:1-8

Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in early 27 AD, and John was put in prison by Herod by mid-28 AD (Matthew 11:1-6). When we encounter Apollos and John's twelve disciples in Acts 19, it was about 53 AD, or about 26 years later. The ministry of John the Baptist was still ongoing, even though John himself was martyred by Herod 25 years earlier.

Apollos had been one of the original Seventy Apostles and was from Alexandria. But he seemed to have been out of town at Pentecost, and was not in the Upper Room when the Holy Spirit was given. Yet he seems to have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit anyway through his zeal for God. In addition to Apollos, Luke mentioned twelve other followers of John the Baptist who had not been enlightened like Apollos. Paul then had them baptized and they received the Holy Spirit.

“Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the Baptism of John. So, he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 18:24-28).

“It happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ So, they said to him, ‘We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit’. And he said to them, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ So, they said, ‘Into John's baptism’. Then Paul said, ‘John indeed 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’. When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all” (Acts 19:1-7).

To understand the impact of John's baptisms, one can look at the effects of John's impact a generation after his death. Luke tells us about Apollos who was “fervent in spirit” and who taught accurately the things of the Lord even though he knew only the baptism of John (Acts 18:24, 25; 19:1-3). This occurred at the beginning of Paul's 3<sup>rd</sup> Missionary Journey, which was 25 years after the death of John. Apollos 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). For a follower of John to be this zealous long after his death indicates the enormous impact of John's life.

John Chrysostom noted<sup>9</sup> a huge difference between Apollos and the twelve disciples of John the Baptist. Apollos was fervent in Spirit; the twelve didn't even know that there was a Holy Spirit, even though both only knew the Baptism of John. Thus Paul, Aquila and Priscilla treated them differently. To Apollos, they just explained things more accurately; the twelve, they had to baptize.

“Notice that even learned men are now urgently needed. Notice also the spread of the preaching!”

“If Apollos knew only the baptism of John, how is it that he was ‘fervent in the Spirit’, for the Spirit was not given in that way? And if the twelve disciples of John the Baptist needed the baptism of Christ, why wouldn't Apollos need it? What can we say of this? It is not without a meaning that Luke has strung the two incidents together. The same thing that took place in the case of Cornelius (Acts 10), must have taken place also in the case of Apollos. Note that Apollos did not receive baptism. The other twelve followers of John the Baptist knew nothing accurate, not even what related to Jesus.”

“These twelve disciples were very different from Apollos, men who did not even know whether there was a Holy Spirit. ‘Apollos, on the other hand, was fervent in spirit; he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John’ (Acts 18:25). Aquila and Priscilla ‘explained to him the way of God more accurately’ so that Apollos could do the same thing in Achaia; they also gave him letters of introduction. When Apollos arrived in Achaia, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 18:28).

“While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul found the twelve disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19:1). Since they had not so much as heard whether there is any Holy Spirit’, Paul said, ‘John truly baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people, that they should believe on Him who should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus’ (Acts 19:2-4). That the twelve disciples of John did not even believe in Christ is plain from Paul's saying, ‘that they should believe on Him that was to come after John’. Paul did not say that the baptism of John is nothing, but it is incomplete. After the twelve disciples of John were baptized and Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues, and prophesied (Acts 19:5-7). It was likely that the twelve disciples of John had some measure of the Holy Spirit, but it did not appear very obviously.”

John Chrysostom continued to point out<sup>10</sup> how awakened was Apollos in the Spirit. The saints in the various Churches recognized this and treated Apollos accordingly. The twelve disciples of John the Baptist – who had been dead now for about 25 years -- illustrate how incomplete the Baptism of John was. Yet John's baptism of repentance was a very useful thing to have along with the fervor that often came with it, that makes us diligent for virtue.

“Apollos was an awakened man, traveling in foreign parts for this very purpose. Writing of him, Paul said, ‘Now concerning our brother Apollos’ (1 Corinthians 16:12). It was not for nothing that Paul left Aquila and Priscilla at

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<sup>9</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XL, vv. 24-28.

<sup>10</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XL, Recapitulation.

Ephesus; for Apollos' sake, the Spirit so ordered it, that Apollos might come with greater force to Corinth. Why did the Jews in Corinth do nothing to Apollos, but Paul they assaulted? They knew that Paul was the leader, and great was the name of the man. When Apollos wanted to pass into Achaia (Acts 18:27), he did everything by faith. The brethren wrote letters to help him; nowhere was there envy; nowhere was there an evil eye. Aquila teaches, and Apollos lets himself be taught. He wanted to depart, and they sent letters. 'For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly' (Acts 18:28). That he 'publicly' convinced the Jews, his boldness was shown; by the clearness of his arguing, his power was declared; by his convicting them out of the Scriptures, his skill of learning was demonstrated. For neither boldness by itself contributes anything, where there is not power, nor power where there is not boldness."

"Why did the twelve disciples in Ephesus have only the baptism of John? Probably they had been on a visit to Jerusalem at the time of John's preaching, and did not even know Jesus. Paul did not say to them, 'Do you believe in Jesus?' But he said 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' (Acts 19:2). He knew that they had not, but he wished for them to say it, that having learned what they lack, they may ask. From the baptism itself John prophesies: Paul leads them to see that this is the meaning of John's baptism, 'That they should believe on Him that was to come' (Mark 1:7, John 1:27). John said, 'I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire?' (Matthew 3:11). 'When Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied' (Acts 19:6). The gift was twofold: tongues and prophesying. Thus, an important doctrine is revealed: that the baptism of John is incomplete."

"Paul does not say, 'Baptism of forgiveness', but, 'Baptism of repentance'. What is it then? These twelve did not have the Holy Spirit; they were not so fervent, not even instructed. Why did Apollos not receive baptism? The case seems to me to be this: Great was the boldness of the man. 'He taught diligently the things concerning Jesus', but he needed more diligent teaching. Thus, though not knowing everything, by his zeal he attracted the Holy Spirit, in the same manner as Cornelius and his company."

"It would be good if we had the baptism of John now! But if we did, many would still be careless in attaining a life of virtue, and it might be thought that each aimed at tongues and prophesy, not at virtue for the kingdom of heaven's sake. There would be many false prophets; for then 'those who are approved' would not be very 'clear' (1 Corinthians 11:19). Just as, 'Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed' (John 20:29), so those that believe without signs. Jesus said, 'Unless you *people* see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe' (John 4:48). We lose nothing by lack of miracles, if we only pay attention to ourselves. We have the sum and substance of the good things; through baptism we received remission of sins, sanctification, participation of the Spirit, adoption, eternal life. What more could we want?"

## Women in the Early Church

John Chrysostom pointed out<sup>11</sup> briefly how some women served in the early Church. They were more spirited than lions and traveled with the Apostles, facing dangers with them. Yet they didn't do the same things that the men did, but did similar things in a different way. Priscilla taught the Apostle Apollos, but privately. Mary (Magdalene) labored behind the scenes for Paul. Women are not forbidden from teaching; they just don't do it from the Bishop's seat.

“How is this? A woman again is honored and proclaimed victorious! Again, we men are put to shame. Or rather, we are not put to shame only, but have even an honor conferred upon us. We are honored in that we have such women among us; but we are put to shame, in that we men are left so far behind by them. But if we come to know why it comes about that they are so adorned; we too shall speedily overtake them. Why are these women adorned? Let both men and women listen. It is not from bracelets, necklaces, or from the abundance of eunuchs; it is not from their maid-servants, and gold-broidered dresses, but from their labors in behalf of the truth. Paul said, ‘Greet Mary<sup>12</sup>, who labored much for us’ (Romans 16:6); that is, not for herself only, or on her own advancement. Many women of the present day do this, by fasting, and sleeping on the floor; but they labor for others also, so carrying on the race Apostles and Evangelists ran. In what sense then does Paul say, ‘I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence?’ (1 Timothy 2:12) He means to hinder her from publicly coming forward (1 Corinthians 14:35), and from the seat on the bema<sup>13</sup>, not from the word of teaching. If this were the case, how would he have said to the woman that had an unbelieving husband, ‘How do you know, O wife, whether you will save *your* husband?’ (1 Corinthians 7:16) Or how did Paul allow her to admonish children, when he says, ‘She will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control?’ (1 Timothy 2:15) How did Priscilla come to instruct even Apollos? (Acts 18:26) It was not then to cut off useful private conversation that Paul said this; but that above all, it was the teacher's duty to address the public assembly. In the case where the husband was a believer and thoroughly furnished, he might be able to instruct his wife. When the wife is the wiser, then Paul does not forbid her from teaching and improving her husband. Paul does not say that Mary taught much, but that she ‘labored much for us’, because along with teaching she performs other ministries besides; those in the way of dangers, in the way of money, in the way of travels. The women of those days were more spirited than lions, sharing with the Apostles their labors for the Gospel's sake. In this way they traveled with the Apostles, and also performed all other ministries. Even in Christ's day many women followed Him, ‘who provided for Him from their substance’ (Luke 8:3), and waited upon the Teacher.”

John Chrysostom had especially strong praise<sup>14</sup> for Aquila and Priscilla, especially for Priscilla as a woman of God. She was just the wife of a tent-maker, a rather lowly occupation. Yet she instructed the Apostle Apollos and with her husband, laid down her own neck for the Apostle Paul. She helped Paul in all things, provided monetary assistance, housed Paul for two

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<sup>11</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XXXI, v. 6.

<sup>12</sup> From tradition, this was Mary Magdalene.

<sup>13</sup> The “bema” was a slightly raised platform where the Bishop's chair was located.

<sup>14</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XXX, vv. 2-5.

years and opened her house for the Church to meet in both in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:19) and in Rome (Romans 16:3). Even though she was a Jew, she did this for Gentiles! Her fame has spread throughout the world for what she has done. This is one woman well worth emulating!

“Paul greeted Priscilla and Aquila<sup>15</sup> when he wrote to the Church in Rome in c. 55 AD. ‘Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus’ (Romans 16:2). To the excellence of these Luke also bears witness. Partly when he says that Paul ‘stayed with them, for by their occupation they were tentmakers’ (Acts 18:3); and partly when he points out Priscilla as receiving Apollos, and instructing him in the way of the Lord (Acts 18:26). Now these are great things, but what Paul mentions are greater. And what does he mention? In the first place he calls them ‘helpers’, to point out that they had been sharers of his very great labors and dangers. Then Paul says, ‘Who risked their own necks for my life’ (Romans 16:4). They are thoroughly furnished martyrs. For in Nero’s time it is probable that there were thousands of dangers, at the time as he even commanded all Jews to be removed from Rome (Acts 8:2). ‘To whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles’” (Romans 16:4).

“Here he hints at their hospitality, and monetary assistance, holding them in admiration because they had both poured forth their blood, and had made their whole property open to all. These were noble women, hindered no way by their sex in the course of virtue. This is as might be expected. ‘There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Galatians 3:28). What Paul had said of Phoebe (Romans 16:1), that he said also of Priscilla. Of Phoebe, Paul had said, ‘she has been a helper of many and of myself also’ (Romans 16:2). So too of Priscilla ‘to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles’ (Romans 16:4). In order that Paul might not seem to be a flatterer, he mentions many more witnesses to these women.”

“In Rome the Church met in Priscilla and Aquila’s house (Romans 16:5). Priscilla had been so estimable as even to make their house a Church, both by making all in it believers, and because they opened it to all strangers. Paul was not in the habit of calling any houses Churches, only where there was much piety, and much fear of God deeply rooted in them. On this ground he said to the Corinthians also (from Ephesus), ‘Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the Church that is in their house’ (1 Corinthians 16:19). When writing about Onesimus, ‘Paul to Philemon, and to the beloved Apphia, and to the church in your house’ (Philemon 1:1-2). It is possible for a man even in the married state to be worthy of being looked up to, and noble. Notice how Aquila and Priscilla were married and became very honorable, and yet their occupation was far from being honorable; for they were ‘tent-makers’. Still their virtue covered all this, and made them more conspicuous than the sun. Neither their trade nor their marriage (Philippians 4:3) was any bit harmful to them, but the love which Christ required of them, that they exhibited. ‘Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends’ (John 15:13). That which is a proof of being a disciple, they achieved, since they took up the Cross and followed Him. Those who did this for Paul would much rather have displayed their fortitude in Christ’s behalf. Let rich and poor both

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<sup>15</sup> We note that Priscilla and Aquila were no longer in Ephesus where Paul had left them toward the end of his 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey (c. 52 AD). Nero was now on the Throne and Jews were allowed to return to Rome.



hear all this. If Aquila and Priscilla who lived from their labor, and were managers of a workshop, exhibited such profuseness as to be of service to many Churches; what pardon can they expect, who are rich, and yet neglect the poor? They did not spare even their blood for the sake of God's will, but we are sparing even of scanty sums, and many times we don't risk our own soul. So, Priscilla and Aquila risked their lives for Paul, but did they do so with regard to the disciples? Yes! For 'the churches of the Gentiles thank them' (Romans 16:4). Yet they were Jews! But still they had such a clear faith, as to minister to the Gentiles also with all willingness. Such ought women to be, not adorning themselves with 'braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing' (1 Timothy 2:9), but in these good deeds. What empress was so conspicuous or so celebrated as this wife of the tent-maker? Everybody talks about her, not for ten or twenty years, but until the coming of Christ, and all proclaim her fame for things such as adorn far more than any royal diadem. What is greater than to have been a helper of Paul? And at her own peril to have saved the teacher of the world? Consider: how many empresses there are that no one ever speaks of. But the wife of the tent-maker Aquila is everywhere reported of with the tent-maker Paul; and her fame has spread throughout the world. Persians, Scythians, Thracians, and they who dwell in the uttermost parts of the earth, sing of the Christian spirit of this woman, and bless it. How much wealth, how many diadems and purples would you not be glad to give just to obtain such a testimony? Paul calls them 'fellow workers and helpers' on this ground. Paul, the 'chosen vessel' (Acts 9:15), does not feel ashamed to call a woman (Priscilla) his helper but even finds an honor in doing so. It is not the sex that Paul was addressing; but the will is what he honors. What is equal to this ornament? Notice that the dress of woman is not that put about the body, but that which decorates the soul, which is never put off, which does not lie in a chest, but is laid up in the heavens. Look at their labor for the preaching, the crown in martyrdom, the munificence in money, the love of Paul, the charm they found in Christ. We might compare this with our own ways, our anxiety about money, our vying with harlots (i.e. in dress), and then we will see who they were and who we are. Or rather do not compare only, but compete with Priscilla, and after laying aside the burdens of clothing, take the dress from heaven, and learn how Priscilla became such as she was. How did they become so? For two years they entertained Paul as a guest (Acts 19:10, 18:3) and these two years were done for their souls. What can we do then, you will say, because we don't have Paul? If we want, we can have him in a truer sense than they did. For them the sight of Paul was not what made them of such a character, but the words of Paul. So if we are so minded, we can have both Paul, Peter, John and the whole choir of the Prophets, with the Apostles, associating with us continually. If we take the books these blessed ones wrote, and hold a continual exchange with their writings, they will be able to make us like the tent-maker's wife."

John Chrysostom stated<sup>16</sup> that not many people who are wise according to the flesh were called. Some exceptions were the Proconsul on Cyprus, Dionysius the Areopagite and Apollos, where Apollos was wise enough to allow himself to be corrected by Priscilla. Most of the rest

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<sup>16</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, V, 1-2.

were untrained teachers and untrained disciples, who ended up surpassing the wise of their age. Paul did not intentionally call the ignorant; he received both, but the ignorant in much larger numbers. The reason for this is that the wise of this world have a greater hurdle to overcome in that much more of their “wisdom” is useless and prideful.

“Paul said, ‘For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise’ (1 Corinthians 1:26-27). Paul said that, ‘the foolishness of God is wiser than men’ (1 Corinthians 1:25); to demonstrate this, he showed that wisdom is cast out, both by the testimony of Scripture and by the issue of events. By the testimony, where he says, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise’ (1 Corinthians 1:19), Paul put his argument in the form of a question, ‘Where is the wise? Where the scribe?’ (1 Corinthians 1:20) At the same time Paul proved that the thing is not new, but ancient, as it was foretold from the beginning. Paul shows that it was expedient for things to take this course, that the Cross is a demonstration of ineffable power and wisdom, and that the foolishness of God is far mightier than the wisdom of man. Paul proves this not by means of the teachers, but by means of the disciples themselves. ‘Behold your calling’ he said, ‘that not only teachers of an untrained sort, but untrained disciples were objects of His choice; that Christ chose ‘not many wise according to the flesh’ (1 Corinthians 1:26). That of which he is speaking is proved to surpass both in strength and wisdom, in that it convinces both the many and the unwise. It is extremely hard to convince an ignorant person, especially when what is said concerns great and necessary things. However, they did work conviction. Paul calls the Corinthians themselves as witnesses. ‘Behold your calling, brethren’. Consider: doctrines so wise, wiser than all, should be received by ordinary men, testifies the greatest wisdom in the teacher.”

“What does it mean, ‘according to the flesh?’ According to what is in sight; according to the life that now is; according to the discipline of the Gentiles. Paul did not say, ‘No wise man’, but, ‘Not many wise men’ (1 Corinthians 1:26). He had convinced both the Proconsul, (Acts 13:12), the Areopagite (Acts 17:34) and Apollos (Acts 18:26: through Aquila and Priscilla) and other wise men, too, coming over to the Gospel. Paul did not intentionally call the ignorant and pass by the wise, but these also he received, yet the others in much larger number. Why? Because the wise man according to the flesh is full of extreme folly; and it is he who especially answers to the term ‘foolish’, when he will not abandon his corrupt doctrine. As in the case of a physician who might wish to teach certain persons the secrets of his art, those who know a few things, having a perverse mode of practicing the art which they make a point of retaining, would not endure to learn quietly. But they who knew nothing would most readily embrace what was said; even so it was here. The unlearned were more open to conviction, for they were free from the extreme madness of accounting themselves wise. The excess of folly is in these more than any, these, I say, who commit unto reasoning things which cannot be ascertained except by faith. Thus, suppose the smith by means of the tongs drawing out the red-hot iron; if anyone should insist on doing it with his hand, we should vote him guilty of extreme folly: so in like manner the philosophers who

insisted on finding out these things for themselves disparaged the faith. And it was owing to this that they found none of the things they sought for.”

John Chrysostom referred<sup>17</sup> to Aquila and Priscilla as Evangelists as opposed to Apostles, even though Aquila was numbered among the Seventy Apostles, like Mark and Luke, due to the work that they did in the Churches.

“First, Paul lists, ‘Apostles’; for these had all gifts; secondarily, ‘prophets’; for there were some who were not indeed apostles, but prophets, such as Agabus. Thirdly, ‘evangelists’, who did not go about everywhere, but only preached the Gospel, as Priscilla and Aquila. ‘Pastors and teachers’ were those who were entrusted with the charge of a whole nation. What then? Are the pastors and the teachers inferior? Yes, surely; those who were settled and employed about one spot, as Timothy and Titus, were inferior to those who went about the world and preached the Gospel. However, it is not possible from this passage to frame the subordination and precedence, but from another Epistle. ‘He gave’, Paul said; we must not say a word to contradict it. Perhaps by ‘evangelists’, Paul includes those who wrote the Gospels. ‘For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ’” (Ephesians 4:12).

John Chrysostom pointed out<sup>18</sup> that even though Paul said that the Gospel is not preached “with wisdom of words”, this does not make Apollos useless. In fact, he was very helpful.

“If it was ‘not with wisdom of words’ (1 Corinthians 1:17), why did the Church send Apollos, who was eloquent? It was not through confidence in his power of speech, but because he was ‘mighty in the Scriptures’, and ‘confuted the Jews’ (Acts 18:24, 28). Besides the point in question was that the leaders and first disseminators of the word were not eloquent; since these were the very persons to require some great power, for the expulsion of error in the first place; then at the outset, the abundant strength was needed. God could do without educated persons at first; if afterwards some being eloquent were admitted by Him, He did so not because He wanted them, but because He would make no distinctions. He did not need wise men to accomplish whatever He would; if any were afterwards found such, He did not reject them on that account.”

John Chrysostom took a close look<sup>19</sup> at Priscilla’s instructing Apollos and compared that to Paul’s words forbidding women to teach. Paul forbid women from public preaching, but not from private conversation. Even though Mary Magdalene (here referred to) did not preach, she was still referred to in the Early Church as “Equal to the Apostles” along with Priscilla, who instructed Apollos.

“Paul wrote, ‘Greet Mary<sup>20</sup>, who bestowed much labor on us’ (Romans 16:6). How is this? A woman again is honored and proclaimed victorious! We men are honored in that there are such women among us, but we are put to shame,

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<sup>17</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, XI, vv. 11-12.

<sup>18</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, III, 7.

<sup>19</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, XXXI, v. 6.

<sup>20</sup> This is Mary Magdalene, who had been in Rome since just after Pentecost, 30 AD. For her efforts in Rome and later in Ephesus, Mary Magdalene was referred to in the Early Church as “Equal to the Apostles”.

in that we men are left so far behind by them. But if we come to know why they are so adorned; we too shall speedily overtake them. Let both men and women listen. It is not from bracelets or necklaces, but from their labors in behalf of the truth. For Paul says, 'who bestowed much labor on us'; that is, not on herself only, nor upon her own advancement, (for these many women of the present day do, by fasting and sleeping on the floor), but upon others also, so carrying on the race that the Apostles and Evangelists ran. In what sense then does Paul say, 'I don't permit a woman to teach?' (1 Timothy 2:12) He means to hinder her from publicly coming forward (1 Corinthians 14:35), and from the seat on the bema<sup>21</sup> occupied by the Bishop, not from the word of teaching. If this were the case, how would he have said to the woman that had an unbelieving husband: 'How do you know, O wife, whether you will save *your* husband?' (1 Corinthians 7:16) Or why did he allow her to admonish children, when he says, 'She will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control?' (1 Timothy 2:15) How was Priscilla allowed to instruct even Apollos? It was not then to eliminate private conversations that may be advantageous that he said this, but for public speaking, and which it was the teacher's duty to give in the public assembly. In case of the unbelieving husband his wife was allowed to thoroughly furnish him, that he might be able also to instruct her. When she is the wiser, then he does not forbid her teaching and improving him. Paul does not say of Mary, who taught much, but 'who bestowed much labor'; along with teaching she performed other ministries besides, those relating to dangers, money and travels. The women of those days were more spirited than lions, sharing with the Apostles their labors for the Gospel's sake. In this way they traveled with them, and also performed all other ministries. Even in Christ's day women followed Him, 'who provided for Him from their substance' (Luke 8:3), and waited on the Teacher."

John Chrysostom pointed out<sup>22</sup> that Paul fought against various false apostles who taught different doctrines, but Apollos was not one of them. While Paul didn't come with great learning, Apollos did, and he complemented Paul very nicely.

"Paul had said, 'If he that comes preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach'; and 'you receive a different Spirit, which you did not receive; or a different Gospel, which you did not accept' (2 Corinthians 11:4). Paul shows that it is proper to listen to them, not simply if they say something more, but if they said anything more which ought to have been said and was omitted by us. But if it ought not to have been said, and was therefore not said by us; or if they say only the same things as we, why do you gape so admiringly upon them? Yet if they say the same things, why does Paul hinder them? Because they use hypocrisy; they introduce strange doctrines. For the present Paul does not say this, but afterwards asserts it, when he says, 'Such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ' (2 Corinthians 11:13) for the present he withdraws the disciples from their authority by less offensive considerations. This was not out of envy of them; it was to secure the Corinthians in the Faith. Otherwise why doesn't he hinder

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<sup>21</sup> See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bema>. The Bema in ancient Churches was a slightly raised platform area similar to a pulpit area in modern Churches, but larger in area. Only the clergy occupied the Bema.

<sup>22</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XXIII, v.4.

Apollos, who was a ‘learned man, and mighty in the Scriptures’ (Acts 18:24; 1 Corinthians 16:12 ) but even begs him, and promises he will send him? Because together with his learning he preserved also the integrity of the doctrines; but with the false apostles it was the reverse. Therefore, Paul wars with them and blames the disciples for gaping admiringly upon them, saying, ‘if anything that should have been said we omitted and they supplied, we do not hinder you from paying attention to them. But if all has been fully completed by us and nothing left deficient, why is it that they caught you?’” (2 Corinthians 11:14-16 paraphrase)

Gregory of Nyssa wrote<sup>23</sup> that while Paul planted the Church of Corinth, Apollos “watered” the Church (1 Corinthians 3:6) by baptizing many of the new Christians.

“Those in whom the Holy One dwells, He makes holy, even as the Good One makes men good. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are holy and good, and act as a guide to those who approach the mystery. This may well be said of Apollos who watered what Paul planted. Paul planted by his guidance, and Apollos, when he baptizes, waters by Sacramental regeneration, bringing to the mystery those who were instructed by Paul. Thus, we place on a level with Apollos that Spirit Who perfects men through baptism.”

Augustin of Hippo wrote<sup>24</sup> of Paul planting the Church at Corinth, but then Apollos as watering the Church by baptizing many there; Apollos becomes more important because of this.

“The Apostle Paul himself said, ‘For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel’ (1 Corinthians 1:17). To this we may add, that according to this, Apollos, who watered by baptizing begins to be more important than Paul, who planted by preaching the Gospel. Paul claims to himself the relation of father towards the Corinthians in virtue of this very act, and does not grant this to those who came to them after him. Paul says, ‘Though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel’ (1 Corinthians 4:15). He says, ‘I have begotten you’ to the same men to whom he says in another place, ‘I thank God that I baptized none of you but Crispus and Gaius, and I baptized also the household of Stephanas’ (1 Corinthians 1:14-16). He had begotten them, therefore, not through himself, but through the Gospel.”

John Chrysostom didn’t go into detail<sup>25</sup> about what Apollos did in Corinth, but simply noted that it was essential.

“Paul said, ‘I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase’ (1 Corinthians 3:6). That is, I first cast the word into the ground; but in order that the seeds might not wither away through temptations, Apollos added his own part. But the whole was of God. ‘So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase’” (1 Corinthians 3:7).

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<sup>23</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, II, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Augustin of Hippo, Answer to the Letters of Petilian the Donatist, III, lv, 67.

<sup>25</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, VIII, v. 6.

Alexander Roberts wrote<sup>26</sup> that he attributed the great Alexandrian School to the Apostle Apollos. “I have not infrequently treated the rise of the great Alexandrian school as an outcrop from the learning and piety of Apollos; I take this space to record my reasons”:

1. I hold that the character and influence of this brilliant Alexandrian must have operated on Alexandrian converts.
2. The frequent employment by the Alexandrians of the expressions (Acts 18:24) used concerning him by Luke, almost textually, confirms my suspicion that they had his high example always before them.
3. The catechetical school was certainly established in Alexandria from apostolic times. By whom more probably than by Apollos?
4. The Evangelist Mark’s connection with Alexandria rests on no scriptural evidence, yet it is credited.
5. Apollos’ connection with Alexandria is narrated in Scripture, and I can conceive of nothing so probable as that, remembering his own instruction by Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:26), he should have founded catechetical schools for others.
6. All this is conjectural, indeed, but it agrees with known facts.
7. The silence of Clement and the rest suggest that the Evangelist Mark did not start the catechetical schools.
8. The unanimity of the Alexandrians, from Pantaenus downward, in assigning to Paul the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews, while it was so much debated elsewhere, suggests that the Alexandrians had early evidence on this point.
9. Clement’s testimony about Luke convinces me that Apollos was not the author of Hebrews, but had testified to the Alexandrians that Paul was the author. Luke, Paul’s inspired scribe, did not just copy (or translate) the words, but reported in idioms of his own; whether out of Paul’s “Hebrew” or not, is another question.
10. Apollos disappears from history about A.D. 64, on his way homeward, bearing the Epistle to Titus, and possibly a copy of that to the Hebrews, written the previous year. All these facts agree with my conjectures that Apollos closed his labors in his Alexandria.

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<sup>26</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, “Elucidation 4”, in Archelaus, Disputations with Manes, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 6, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1995.

# John's Baptism of Jesus

Revision E

## Gospel: 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.

### How Much Did John Know about Christ?

The sequence of Christ's baptism by John seems to have gone in this order:

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John *tried to* prevent Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?' But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Permit *it to be so* now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness'. Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'" (Matthew 3:13-17).

This means that John recognized Jesus as God before the Holy Spirit descended as a dove. Thus, John recognized Jesus just as he did when he was still in Elizabeth's womb (Luke 1:41), where Jesus had just been conceived at that time and the Virgin Mary was only in her first month of pregnancy. When the Holy Spirit descended as a dove, this undoubtedly confirmed what John already knew.

The people coming to John for baptism may not have known much about what was going on, but they came to John with great fear and trembling. This respect for John was so strong that the chief priests, scribes and elders mentioned that if they said that John's baptism was from men, all the people would stone them for blasphemy (Luke 20:1-7).

Gregory the Theologian stated<sup>27</sup> that not only did John the Baptist know Who Jesus was, but he was aware of his own coming martyrdom, and that Jesus would follow him to Hades. Gregory explains some of the illustrations: the fan, the fire, the axe, the sword, the latchet of the sandal.

"John the Baptist said, 'I need to be baptized by You'; add to this 'and for You'. He knew that he would be baptized by Martyrdom, or, like Peter, that he would be cleansed not only as to his feet (John 13:9). 'And are You coming to me?' (Matthew 3:14) This also was prophetic; for he knew that after Herod would

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<sup>27</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Oration on the Holy Lights, XXXIX, 15.

come the madness of Pilate, and so when he had gone before, Christ would follow him to Hades. But what said Jesus? ‘Permit *it to be so* now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness’ (Matthew 3:15), for this is the time of His Incarnation; for He knew that yet a little while and He should baptize the Baptist. And what is

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the ‘Winnowing Fan?’ (Matthew 3:12) The Purification. And what is the ‘Unquenchable Fire?’ (Matthew 3:12) The consuming of the chaff, and the heat of the Spirit. And what the ‘Axe?’ (Matthew 3:10) The excision of the soul which is incurable even after it is fertilized (Luke 13:8). And what the Sword? The cutting of the Word, which separates the worse from the better (Hebrews 4:12), and makes a division between the faithful and the unbeliever (Matthew 10:35). It also stirs up the son and the daughter and the bride against the father and the mother and the mother in law (Micah 7:6), the young and fresh against the old and shadowy. And what is the latchet of the shoe, which you John who baptized Jesus may not loosen? (John 1:27) You are of the desert, and have no food, the new Elijah (Luke 7:26-28), the more than Prophet, inasmuch as you saw Him of Whom you prophesied, you are the Mediator of the Old and New Testaments. What is this? Perhaps the Message of the Advent, and the Incarnation, of which not the least point may be loosed, I say not by those who are yet carnal and babes in Christ, but not even by those who are like John in spirit.”

John Chrysostom stated<sup>28</sup> that even though Jesus would later come as the Judge of the living and the dead, He first came along with servants and criminals to be baptized by John. The amazing thing is that Christ took on human flesh; being baptized by John is just another part of His humanity. John recognized Who Jesus was and suggested that he needed to be baptized by Jesus.

“Along with the servants and with criminals, the Judge, Himself, comes to be baptized. But don’t be troubled; for in these humiliations His exaltation most shines forth. For He granted Himself to be born and to stay so long in a Virgin’s womb, to come forth with our nature, and to be struck with rods, crucified, and to suffer all the rest which He suffered. Why do we marvel if He also granted to be baptized, and to come with the rest to His servant, John? For the amazement lay in that one thing, that being God, He would be made Man; but the rest all follows in course of reason.”

“For this cause, let me add, John also by way of anticipation said all that he had said before, that he ‘was not worthy to loosen His sandal strap’ (Luke 3:16) and all the rest. For instance, that He is Judge, and rewards every man according to his desert, and that He will bestow His Spirit abundantly on all. In order that when we see Him coming to the baptism, we might not suspect anything common. Therefore, John forbids Him, even when He came, saying.”

“‘I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?’ (Matthew 3:14). For, because the baptism was ‘of repentance’ (Matthew 3:11), and led men to accuse themselves for their offenses, lest anyone should suppose that He too ‘comes to Jordan’ in this sort of mind, John sets it right beforehand, by calling Him both Lamb, and Redeemer from all the sin that is in the world. Since He that was

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<sup>28</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XII, 1.



able to take away the sins of the whole race of men, much more was He Himself without sin. For this cause then John didn't say, 'Behold, He that is without sin', but what was much more, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1:29). John said this in order that together with this truth we might receive that other with all assurance, and having received it might perceive, that in the conduct of some further economy He comes to the baptism."

John the Baptist stated that he did not know Jesus before Jesus came to him for baptism. He said that Jesus was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit descending as a dove and remaining on Jesus. There may have been more than one level of recognition of Jesus by John. That is, when Jesus came to John for baptism, John may have recognized Him as someone exalted. But then when the Holy Spirit descended as a dove, John's recognition may have progressed to another level.

John Chrysostom stated<sup>29</sup> that if John came preaching but not baptizing, not nearly as many people would have come to him. John said:

"And John bore witness, saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but 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.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God" (John 1:32-34).

But Jesus came back to see John the Baptist the next day. The Apostle John gives more details of this than Matthew gives. On this second day, John further testified of Jesus and some of John's disciples began to follow Jesus.

"Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus" (John 1:35-37).

Gregory the Wonder-Worker stated<sup>30</sup> very eloquently what Christ was doing by being baptized by John. Christ came very humbly and did not need to be baptized since He had no sin. John recognized Him, just as he recognized Him before he was born, and was aghast that Christ wanted to be baptized by him.

"Notice John the Baptist as he baptizes One who needs no baptism, and yet submits to the rite in order that He may bestow freely upon us the grace of baptism. Come, let us view the image of our regeneration, as it is emblematically presented in these waters. 'Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him' (Matthew 3:13). O how vast is the humility of the Lord! O how vast His condescension! The King of the heavens hastened to John, His own forerunner, without setting in motion the armies of His angels, without dispatching beforehand the incorporeal powers as His precursors. He presented Himself in utmost simplicity, in soldier-like form; He comes to His own servant. He approached him as one of the multitudes, and humbled Himself among the captives though He was

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<sup>29</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, XVII, 1.

<sup>30</sup> Gregory the Wonder-Worker, *Four Homilies*, IV, On the Holy Theophany. Modern editors suspect that the eloquence of these homilies suggest that the work has been edited and interpolated over the centuries.

the Redeemer, and ranged Himself with those under judgment though He was the Judge. He joined Himself with the lost sheep though He was the Good Shepherd who on account of the straying sheep came down from heaven. Yet He did not forsake His heavens, and was mingled with the tares though He was that heavenly grain that springs unsown. And the Baptist John then saw Him, recognizing Him whom before in his mother's womb he had recognized and worshipped (Luke 1:41). John discerned clearly that this was He on whose account, in a manner surpassing the natural time, he had leaped in the womb of his mother in violation of the limits of nature. John drew his right hand within his double cloak, and bowing his head like a servant full of love to his master, addressed Him in these words: 'I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?' (Matthew 3:14) What is this You are doing, my Lord? Why do You reverse the order of things? Why do You seek along with the servants, at the hand of Your servant, the things that are proper to servants? Why do You desire to receive what You don't require? Why do You burden me, Your servant, with Your mighty condescension? 'I need to be baptized by You, but You have no need to be baptized by me'".

John Chrysostom stated<sup>31</sup> that John the Baptist pointed so strongly to Christ that no one questioned what he was doing. John did not speak at length about this because he could see that the people who he was dealing with were not sensible about this. Anyone who received what he said, such as the Twelve Apostles and most of the Seventy would be quickly brought in once they heard Christ themselves.

"Notice John the Baptist had said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me' (John 1:15, 27, 30); and that 'His sandal strap I am not worthy to loosen' (John 1:27). Also, that 'He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire' (Matthew 3:11); and that he 'saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him.' (John 1:32-33), and he 'has seen and testified that this is the Son of God' (John 1:34). No one paid attention, nor asked, nor said, 'Why do you say these things? On whose behalf? For what reason?' Again, he had said, 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29, 36); yet not even so did he touch their insensibility. Therefore, after this he is compelled to repeat the same words again, as if softening by tillage some hard and stubborn soil, and by his word as by a plow, disturbing the mind which had hardened into clods, so as to put in the seed deep. For this reason, he does not make his discourse a long one either; because he desired one thing only, to bring them over and join them to Christ. John knew that as soon as they had received this saying, and had been persuaded, they would not afterwards need one to bear witness to Christ. And this also came to pass. For, the Samaritans said to the woman after hearing Him, 'Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard *Him* and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world' (John 4:42). The disciples would be much more quickly subdued, as was the case. For when they had come and heard Him but one evening, they returned no more to John, but were so nailed to Him, that they took upon them the ministry of John, and themselves proclaimed Him. For, the Apostle John said, 'Andrew first found his

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<sup>31</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XVIII, 1.

own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ)" (John 1:41).

## **The Magnitude of What John Did**

### **Fulfilling All Righteousness**

John the Baptist was very clear on what his role was; he was not the Christ. But he said that the Christ was coming and the people of his day don't even know who He is. Jesus used His flesh to conceal His Deity and He came very humbly. This was why He asked John to baptize Him anyway, even though He had no sins to confess. Everyone thought that John was greater than Jesus, figuring that the baptizer is greater than the newly baptized. When God the Father spoke with a voice of thunder from heaven, "This is My Beloved Son" (Matthew 3:17), few people seemed to understand what had happened. John went along with Jesus' request to be baptized, but John may not have understood why this was necessary at the time.

Hippolytus of Rome described<sup>32</sup> the role of John the Baptist in dealing with his Master, Christ. He is the servant, the subject, the sheep and a man; Christ is the Lord, the King, the Shepherd and God. John said, "Why pay attention to me; I am not the Christ".

"John, the forerunner of the Lord, who before knew not this mystery, on learning that He is Lord in truth, cried out, and spoke to those who came to be baptized of him: 'Brood of vipers' (Matthew 3:7), why do you look so earnestly at me? 'I am not the Christ' (John 1:20). 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 loosened the barrenness of my mother; I did not make virginity barren<sup>33</sup>. 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 'He who, coming after me, is preferred before me' (John 1:27) — after me, indeed, in time, but before me by reason of the inaccessible and unutterable light of divinity. 'He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire' (Matthew 3:11). 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 bringeth grace to light. I teach as a slave, but He judges 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. 'He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire'. Why pay attention to me? I am not the Christ."

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<sup>32</sup> Hippolytus of Rome, "Discourse on Holy Theophany", 3, in Extant Works and Fragments of Hippolytus, Part 2, Dogmatic and Historical.

<sup>33</sup> That is, He did not terminate Mary's virginity when He was born, but preserved her virginity, but gifted her with the name of mother.

Gregory the Wonder-Worker pointed out<sup>34</sup> what Jesus meant when He asked John the Baptist to permit His baptism to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus was concealing His Divinity from the devil so that He could lead the devil into a trap where the devil might receive a mortal wound.

“Jesus answered John at His baptism: ‘Permit *it to be so* now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness’ (Matthew 3:15). Allow it to be so now; grant the favor of silence, O Baptist, to the season of My economy. Learn to will whatever is My will. Learn to minister to Me in those things on which I am bent, and do not pry curiously into all that I wish to do. Allow it to be so now; do not yet proclaim My Divinity; do not yet herald My kingdom with thy lips, in order that the tyrant may not learn the fact and give up the counsel he has formed with respect to Me. Permit the devil to come upon Me, and enter the conflict with Me as though I were but a common man, and receive thus his mortal wound. Permit Me to fulfill the object for which I have come to earth. It is a mystery that is being gone through this day in the Jordan. My mysteries are for Myself and My own. There is a mystery here, not for the fulfilling of My own need, but for the designing of a remedy for those who have been wounded. There is a mystery, which gives in these waters the representation of the heavenly streams of the regeneration of men. Allow it to be so now; when you see Me doing what seems to Me good among the works of My hands, in a manner befitting divinity, then attune your praises to the acts accomplished.”

John Chrysostom explained<sup>35</sup> what Christ meant by saying to John the Baptist, “thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness”. By “righteousness”, Christ meant the full performance of all the commandments.

“After His baptism Christ was to do away with the law: wherefore, even until this age, which admits of all sins, He continues fulfilling it all. That no one might say, that because He Himself could not fulfill it, He did it away. For neither do all passions assail us at all times; but while in the first age of life there is much thoughtlessness and timidity, in that which comes after it, pleasure is more vehement, and after this again the desire of wealth. For this cause, he awaits the fullness of His adult age, and throughout it all fulfills the law, and so comes to His baptism, adding it as something which follows upon the complete keeping of all the other commandments.”

“To prove that this was to Him the last good work of those enjoined by the law, hear His own words: ‘Permit *it to be so* now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness’ (Matthew 3:15). Now what He saith is like this: “We have performed all the duties of the law; we have not transgressed so much as one commandment. Since therefore this only remains, this too must be added, and so shall we ‘fulfill all righteousness’. For He here calls by the name of ‘righteousness’ the full performance of all the commandments.”

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<sup>34</sup> Gregory the Wonder-Worker, Four Homilies, IV, On the Holy Theophany. Modern editors suspect that the eloquence of these homilies suggest that the work has been edited and interpolated over the centuries.

<sup>35</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, X, 1.

John Chrysostom also stated<sup>36</sup> that Christ fulfilled the Law in three separate ways. First, He fulfilled the Law by transgressing none of its precepts. Second, He fulfilled the Law by granting that we might be able to do so also. Third, He fulfilled the Law by making the Law stricter: thus “do not murder” becomes “do not be angry”.

“How, one may ask, did Christ not destroy the Law? In what way did He rather fulfill either the Law or the prophets? The prophets He fulfilled, inasmuch as He confirmed by His actions all that had been said concerning Him; wherefore Matthew<sup>37</sup> used to say in each case, ‘That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet’. Both when He was born (Matthew 1:22-23), and when the children sung that wondrous hymn to Him, and when He sat on the donkey (Matthew 21:5-16). In very many more instances He worked this same fulfillment; all which things must have been unfulfilled, if He had not come.”

“But the Law He fulfilled, not in one way only, but in a second and third also. In one way, by transgressing none of the precepts of the Law. For that He did fulfill it all, hear what He saith to John, ‘For thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness’ (Matthew 3:15). And to the Jews also He said, ‘Which of you convicts me of sin’ (John 8:46). And to His disciples again, ‘The ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in me’ (John 14:30). And Isaiah too from the first had said that ‘He had done no violence, nor *was any* deceit in His mouth” (Isaiah 53:9).

“This then was one sense in which He fulfilled it. Another, that He did the same through us also; for this is the marvel, that He not only Himself fulfilled it, but He granted this to us likewise. Which thing Paul also declared, ‘For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes’ (Romans 10:4). And he said also, that ‘He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit’ (Romans 8:3-4). And again, ‘Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law’ (Romans 3:31). For since the Law was laboring at this, to make man righteous, but had not power, He came and brought in the way of righteousness by faith, and so established that which the Law desired: and what the Law could not by letters, this He accomplished by faith. On this account He said, ‘I did not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17).

“But if anyone will inquire accurately, he will find also another, a third sense, in which this hath been done. Of what sort is it then? In the sense of that future code of laws, which He was about to deliver to them. For His sayings were no repeal of the former, but a drawing out, and filling up of them. Thus, ‘not to kill’, is not annulled by the saying, ‘Be not angry’ (Matthew 5:22), but rather is filled up and put in greater security: and so, of all the others.”

“Wherefore, you see, as He had before unsuspectedly cast the seeds of this teaching; so, at the time when from His comparison of the old and new commandments, He would be more distinctly suspected of placing them in opposition, He used His corrective beforehand. For in a covert way He had indeed

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<sup>36</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, XVI, 3-4.

<sup>37</sup> For example, see Matthew 1:22, 2:15-23, 4:14, 8:17, 12:17, 13:14, 13:35, 21:4, 26:54-56, 27:9, 27:35; Mark 15:28; Luke 4:21, 21:22-24, 24:44; John 12:38, 13:18, 15:25, 17:12, 18:9, 18:32, 19:24-28, 19:36.

already scattered those seeds, by what He had said. Thus, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’ (Matthew 5:3), is the same as that we are not to be angry; and, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart’ (Matthew 5:8), as not to ‘look upon a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart’ (Matthew 5:28); and the ‘not laying up treasures on earth’ (Matthew 6:19-20), harmonizes with, ‘Blessed are the merciful’ (Matthew 5:7); and ‘to mourn’ (Matthew 5:4) also, ‘to be persecuted’ and ‘reviled’ (Matthew 5:10-11), coincide with ‘entering in at the narrow gate’ (Matthew 7:13-14); and, ‘to hunger and thirst after righteousness’ (Matthew 5:6), is nothing else than that which He said afterwards, ‘whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them’ (Matthew 7:12). And having declared ‘the peace-maker blessed’ (Matthew 5:9), He again almost said the same, when He gave command ‘to leave the gift’ (Matthew 5:23-24), and hasten to reconciliation with him that was grieved, and about ‘agreeing with our adversary’” (Matthew 5:25).

Gregory the Wonder-Worker also stated<sup>38</sup> that John obeyed Jesus’ command to baptize Him, while all the onlookers thought that John was greater than Jesus. God the Father tried to correct their erroneous imagination by speaking from heaven “This is My Beloved Son”; people heard His words in thunder, but they don’t seem to have understood.

“On hearing these words, the Baptist directed his mind to the object of the salvation, and comprehended the mystery which he had received, and discharged the divine command. For he was at once pious and ready to obey. Stretching forth slowly his right hand, which seemed both to tremble and to rejoice, he baptized the Lord. Then the Jews who were present, with those in the vicinity and those from a distance, reasoned together, and spoke thus with themselves and with each other. Was it, then, without cause that we imagined John to be superior to Jesus? Was it without cause that we considered John to be greater than Jesus? Does not this very baptism attest the Baptist’s pre-eminence? Is not he who baptizes presented as the superior, and he who is baptized as the inferior? They, in their ignorance of the mystery of the economy, babbled in such wise with each other. He who alone is Lord, and by nature the Father of the Only-begotten, He who alone knows perfectly Him whom He alone in passionless fashion begat, attempted to correct the erroneous imaginations of the Jews. He opened the gates of the heavens, and sent down the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, lighting upon the head of Jesus, pointing out thereby the new Noah, yea the maker of Noah, and the good pilot of the nature which is in shipwreck. He Himself called with clear voice out of heaven, and said: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’ (Matthew 3:17). He spoke of Jesus, and not the John; the one baptized, and not the one baptizing; He who was begotten of Me before all periods of time and not he who was begotten of Zacharias. He who was born of Mary after the flesh, and not he who was brought forth by Elisabeth beyond all expectation; He who was the fruit of the virginity yet preserved intact, and not he who was the shoot from a sterility removed. He who has had His conversation with You, and not he who was brought up in the wilderness. This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: My Son, of the same substance with Myself, and not of a different. He is of one substance with Me according to what

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<sup>38</sup> Gregory the Wonder-Worker, *Four Homilies*, IV, On the Holy Theophany. Modern editors suspect that the eloquence of these homilies suggest that the work has been edited and interpolated over the centuries.

is unseen, and of one substance with you according to what is seen, yet without sin. This is He who along with Me created man. This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

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).

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.

### **The Effects of Baptism**

John Chrysostom referred<sup>39</sup> to John’s methodology as the “friend of the Bridegroom”. John did not try to exalt himself, but he was eager for the Bridegroom to have the bride (which is the Church). For the present, John was delighted to merely stand and listen to the Bridegroom (Christ).

“He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice’ (John 3:29). But how does he who said, ‘whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loosen’ (Mark 1:7) now call himself His ‘friend’? It is not to exalt himself, nor boastingly, that he said this, but from desire to show that he too most forwards this, (i.e. the exaltation of Christ,) and that these things come to pass not against his will or to his grief, but that he desires and is eager for them. It was with a special view to them that all his actions had been performed; and this he has very wisely shown by the term ‘friend’. For on occasions like marriages, the servants

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<sup>39</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXIX, 2-3

of the bridegroom are not so glad and joyful as his 'friends'. It was not from any desire to prove equality of honor, but only excess of pleasure, and moreover from condescension to their weakness that he calleth himself 'friend'. For his service he before declared by saying, 'I am sent before Him' (Mark 1:2). On this account, and because they thought that he was vexed at what had taken place, he called himself the 'friend of the Bridegroom', to show that he was not only not vexed, but that he even greatly rejoiced. For, I came to accomplish this, and am so far from grieving at what has been done, that had it not come to pass, I should then have been greatly grieved. Had the bride not come to the Bridegroom, then I should have been grieved, but not now, since my task has been accomplished. When His servants are advancing, we are they who gain the honor for that which we desired has come to pass, and the bride knows the Bridegroom. You are witnesses of it when you say, 'All men come to Him'. 'This I earnestly desired, I did all to this end; and now when I see that it has come to pass, I am glad, and rejoice, and leap for joy'".

"But what does it mean, 'He who stands and hears Him rejoices greatly, because of the Bridegroom's voice'? He transfers the expression from the parable to the subject in hand; for after mentioning the bridegroom and the bride, he shows how the bride is brought home, that is, by a 'Voice' and teaching. For thus the Church is wedded to God; and by a 'Voice' and teaching. For thus the Church is wedded to God; and, therefore, Paul said, 'Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God' (Romans 10:17). 'At this 'Voice', John said, 'I rejoice'. And not without a cause does he say 'who stands', but to show that his office had ceased, that he had given over 'the Bride' to Him, and must for the future stand and listen to Him. He was a servant and minister; his good hope and his joy was now accomplished. 'Therefore, John said, this joy of mine is fulfilled'" (John 3:29).

Hippolytus of Rome commented<sup>40</sup> on this to say that the devil was struck with amazement at John baptizing Christ. After all, Christ appeared plain, solitary, poorly clothed, without angelic escort as John said that he needed to be baptized by Christ. And Christ had no sins to confess.

"As John said that he was not the Christ to the multitude, the people watched in eager expectation of seeing some strange spectacle with their bodily eyes. The devil was struck with amazement<sup>41</sup> at such a testimony from John; then, 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, 'I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?' (Matthew 3:14) 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?"

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<sup>40</sup> Hippolytus of Rome, "Discourse on Holy Theophany", 4, in Extant Works and Fragments of Hippolytus, Part 2, Dogmatic and Historical.

<sup>41</sup> It was a common opinion among the ancient theologians that the devil was ignorant of the mysteries of the economy. See Matthew 4:3; 1 Corinthians 2:8.



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?’”

Hippolytus of Rome also described<sup>42</sup> the interaction between John the Baptist and Jesus at Jesus’ baptism. John didn’t understand it, but Jesus asked him to go along anyway, because He had a purpose for doing it this way.

“And what did the Lord say to him? ‘Permit *it to be so* now, for thus it is fitting for 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 lacking to its whole fulfillment, that so after me Paul may exclaim, ‘Christ is the fulfilling of the law for righteousness to everyone 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. ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness’. Then at length John permits Him. ‘When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”’” (Matthew 3:16-17).

Jesus said, “I do not receive testimony from man” (John 5:34), but yet he seems to have received the testimony of John the Baptist. John Chrysostom made two points<sup>43</sup> regarding this: (1) John’s testimony was that of God. (2) Because others paid so much attention to John, Jesus reminded them that John testified of Him.

“John’s testimony was not the ‘testimony of man’, for, John said, ‘He Who sent me to baptize with water, said to me’ (John 1:33). So John’s testimony was the testimony of God; for having learned from Him, he said what he did. But that none should ask, ‘Why is it clear that John learned from God?’, and stop at this. He abundantly silences them by still addressing Himself to their thoughts. For it was not likely that many would know these things; they had beforehand paid attention to John as to one who spoke of Himself. Therefore, Christ said, ‘I do not receive testimony from man’ (John 5:34). And that the Jews might not ask, ‘If You

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<sup>42</sup> Hippolytus of Rome, “Discourse on Holy Theophany”, 5, in Extant Works and Fragments of Hippolytus, Part 2, Dogmatic and Historical.

<sup>43</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XL, 2.

were not about to receive the testimony of John, and by it to strengthen Yourself, why have You brought forward his testimony?’ Notice how He corrects this contradiction by what He adds. For after saying, ‘I do not receive testimony from man’, He has added, ‘But these things I say, that ye may be saved’ (John 5:34). What He said is of this kind; ‘I, being God, didn’t need the witness of John which is man’s witness. Yet because you paid more attention to him, believe him more trustworthy than any, ran to him as to a prophet, (for all the city poured forth to Jordan,) and have not believed on Me, even when working miracles, therefore I remind you of that witness of his’”.

Antony the Great of Egypt stated<sup>44</sup> that the Kingdom of God is within us and that we should not seek worldly things outside of ourselves. Virtue needs our willingness alone. When the soul has its spiritual faculty in a natural state, virtue is formed; it is in a natural state when it remains as it came into existence. John the Baptist said, “Make His paths straight”. As we have received the soul as a deposit, let us preserve it for the Lord.

“Wherefore having already begun and set out in the way of virtue, let us strive the more that we may attain those things that are before. Let no one turn to the things behind, like Lot’s wife, all the more so that the Lord has said: ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God’ (Luke 9:62). And this turning back is nothing else but to feel regret, and to be once more worldly-minded. But fear not to hear of virtue, nor be astonished at the Name. For it is not far from us, nor is it outside ourselves, but it is within us, and is easy if only we are willing. That they may get knowledge, the Greeks live abroad and cross the sea, but we have no need to depart from home for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, nor to cross the sea for the sake of virtue. For the Lord has said, ‘The kingdom of God is within you’ (Luke 17:21). Therefore, virtue needs our willingness alone, since it is in us and is formed from us. For when the soul has its spiritual faculty in a natural state, virtue is formed. And it is in a natural state when it remains as it came into existence. And when it came into existence it was fair and exceeding honest. For this cause Joshua, the son of Nun, in his exhortation said to the people, said, ‘Set your heart straight toward the Lord God of Israel’ (Joshua 24:23 LXX), and John said, ‘Make His paths straight’ (Matthew 3:3). For rectitude of soul consists in having its spiritual part in its natural state as created. But on the other hand, when it swerves and turns away from its natural state, that is called vice of the soul. Thus, the matter is not difficult. If we abide as we have been made, we are in a state of virtue, but if we think of ignoble things, we shall be accounted evil. If, therefore, this thing had to be acquired from without, it would be difficult in reality; but if it is in us, let us keep ourselves from foul thoughts. And as we have received the soul as a deposit, let us preserve it for the Lord, that He may recognize His work as being the same as He made it.”

Hippolytus of Rome summarized<sup>45</sup> the effect of baptism on the Christian life. We become immortal and after the resurrection, we become like God; now we are made God by water and the

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<sup>44</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Life of Antony*, 20.

<sup>45</sup> Hippolytus of Rome, “Discourse on Holy Theophany”, 8-9, in *Extant Works and Fragments of Hippolytus*, Part 2, Dogmatic and Historical.

Spirit, and we are joint heirs with Christ. This is the same Spirit Who has been featured in every aspect of the Christian life from the beginning.

“The Father of immortality sent the immortal Son and Word into the world, who came to man in order to wash him with water and the Spirit. He, begetting us again to incorruption of soul and body, breathed into us the breath (spirit) of life, and endued us with an incorruptible collection of armaments. If, therefore, man has become immortal, he will also be God. And if he is made God by water and the Holy Spirit after the regeneration of the laver, he is found to be also joint-heir with Christ after the resurrection from the dead. Wherefore I preach to this effect: Come, all kindreds of the nations, to the immortality of the baptism. I bring good tidings of life to you who wait in the darkness of ignorance. Come into liberty from slavery, into a kingdom from tyranny, into incorruption from corruption. And how, says one, shall we come? How? By water and the Holy Spirit. This is the water in conjunction with the Spirit, by which paradise is watered, by which the earth is enriched, by which plants grow, by which animals multiply. To sum up the whole in a single word, by which man is begotten again and endued with life, in which also Christ was baptized, and in which the Spirit descended in the form of a dove.”

“This is the Spirit that at the beginning ‘was hovering over the face of the waters’ (Genesis 1:2); by whom the world moves; by whom creation consists, and all things have life. He also spoke rightly through the prophets (Acts 28:25), and descended in flight upon Christ (Matthew 3:16). This is the Spirit that was given to the Apostles in the form of fiery tongues (Acts 2:3). This is the Spirit that David sought when he said, ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me’ (Psalm 51:10). Of this Spirit Gabriel also spoke to the Virgin, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you’ (Luke 1:35). By this Spirit Peter spoke that blessed word, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’ (Matthew 16:16). By this Spirit the rock of the Church was established (Matthew 16:18). This is the Spirit, the Comforter, that is sent because of Christ, that He may show Christ to be the Son of God.”

The Gospel reading from John 1 gives us more details of the encounter between John and Jesus. 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 the Baptist 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 thundered 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).

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

## Blessing of the Waters 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 water pots filled with water poured on top of the offering and the wood such that everything was drenched and the trench<sup>46</sup> 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 (8<sup>th</sup> 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<sup>47</sup> we ascend to God". Because the Lord

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<sup>46</sup> 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 water pots were carried on the shoulders (Genesis 24:14-20, Judges 7:16-20) and held about 4 gallons each.

<sup>47</sup> Germanus, Katavasia for Epiphany Matins

sanctified the waters of baptism by consenting to be baptized, so the Church, His Body, does today<sup>48</sup>.

Gregory the Theologian summarized<sup>49</sup> Epiphany to point out that Christ did not need to be baptized by John the Baptist, since He had no sin to confess. What He did, however, was sanctify the element of water for our benefit. Gregory lists a number of contrasts in the life of Christ: He was tempted as man, but conquered as God. He hungered, but He fed thousands; He was weary, but He is Rest. He prays, but He hears prayer; He asks where Lazarus is as a man, but He raises Lazarus as God.

“He was baptized as Man (Matthew 3:13) — but He remitted sins as God (Matthew 9:6) — not because He needed purificatory rites Himself, but that He might sanctify the element of water. He was tempted as Man, but He conquered as God; He bids us be of good cheer, for He has overcome the world (John 16:33). He hungered — but He fed thousands (John 6:10-13); He is the Bread that gives life (John 6:32-35), and that is of heaven. He thirsted — but He cried, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink’ (John 7:37). He promised that rivers should flow from them that believe (John 7:38). He was wearied (John 4:6), but He is the Rest of them that are weary and heavy laden (Matthew 11:28). He was heavy with sleep (Matthew 8:24), but He walked lightly over the sea (Matthew 14:25-26). He rebuked the winds (Mark 4:39-41), He made Peter light as he began to sink (Matthew 14:28-29). He pays tribute, but it is out of a fish (Matthew 17:24-27); He is the King of those who demanded it (John 19:19). He is called a Samaritan and a demoniac (John 8:48); — but He saves him that came down from Jerusalem and fell among thieves (Luke 10:30-36). The demons acknowledge Him (Luke 8:28), and He drives out demons and sinks in the sea legions of foul spirits (Luke 8:29-36), and sees the Prince of the demons falling like lightning (Luke 10:18). He is stoned, but is not taken (John 8:59). He prays (Matthew 14:23), but He hears prayer (John 1:48-50). He weeps (John 11:32), but He causes tears to cease (Revelation 21:4). He asks where Lazarus was laid, for He was Man (John 11:34); but He raises Lazarus, for He was God (John 11:43-44). He is sold, and very cheap, for it is only for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15); but He redeems the world, and that at a great price, for the Price was His own blood (1 Peter 1:19). As a sheep He is led to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7), but He is the Shepherd of Israel (Psalm 80:1), and now of the whole world also. As a Lamb He is silent (Isaiah 53:7), yet He is the Word, and is proclaimed by the Voice of one crying in the wilderness (John 1:23). He is bruised and wounded (Isaiah 53:5), but He heals every disease and every infirmity (Matthew 8:16). He is lifted up and nailed to the Tree (John 19:17-20), but by the Tree of Life He restores us (Revelation 22:2); He saves even the Robber crucified with Him (Luke 23:43); He wrapped the visible world in darkness (Matthew 27:45). He is given vinegar to drink mingled with gall (Matthew 27:34). Who? He who turned the water into wine? (John 2:1-11) Who is the destroyer of the bitter taste, who is Sweetness and altogether desire (Song of Solomon 5:16). He lays down His life, but He has power to take it again (John

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<sup>48</sup> For additional details, see the Appendix I discussion for Psalm 77.

<sup>49</sup> Gregory the Great, 3<sup>rd</sup> Theological Oration, XXIX, 20.

10:18); and the veil is rent, for the mysterious doors of Heaven are opened; the rocks are cleft, the dead arise (Matthew 27:51). He dies, but He gives life, and by His death destroys death (Hebrews 2:14-15). He is buried, but He rises again (Matthew 28:6); He goes down into Hades, but He brings up the souls (Ephesians 4:8-10); He ascends to Heaven, and shall come again to judge the living and the dead (2 Timothy 4:1).”

Cyril of Jerusalem stated<sup>50</sup> that Christ was baptized, not because he had any sin, but to give us a divine and excellent grace. By our participation in Baptism, we receive salvation and honor. He was our forerunner in Baptism to lead the way to the Kingdom of God.

“Jesus sanctified Baptism by being Himself baptized. If the Son of God was baptized, what godly man is he that despises Baptism? But He was baptized not that He might receive remission of sins, for He was sinless; but being sinless, He was baptized, that He might give to them that are baptized a divine and excellent grace. For since ‘the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He Himself also likewise shared in the same’ (Hebrews 2:14), that having been made partakers of His presence in the flesh we might be made partakers also of His Divine grace. Thus, Jesus was baptized, that thereby we again by our participation might receive both salvation and honor. According to Job, there was in the waters the dragon that ‘draws up Jordan into his mouth’ (Job 40:23). Since, therefore, it was necessary to ‘break the heads of the dragon in pieces’ (Psalm 74:14), Christ went down and bound the strong one in the waters, that we might receive power to ‘trample on serpents and scorpions’ (Luke 10:19). The beast was great and terrible. No fishing-vessel was able to carry even the skin of his tail (Job 41:7 LXX); before him destruction runs (Job 41:22), ravaging all that met him. The Life encountered him, that the mouth of Death might henceforth be stopped, and all we that are saved might say, ‘O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’ (1 Corinthians 15:55) The sting of death is drawn out by Baptism.”

Gregory the Theologian also noted<sup>51</sup> that Christ sanctified the waters by His Baptism. He had no need for purification, since He takes away the sin of the world.

“Jesus submitted to be purified in the River Jordan for my Purification, or rather, sanctifying the waters by His Purification. For indeed He had no need of purification, Who takes away the sin of the world. The heavens were cleft asunder, and witness borne to him by the Spirit, That is of one nature with Him (Matthew 3:16-17). You shall see Him tempted and conquering and served by Angels (Matthew 4:1-11), and healing every sickness and every disease (Matthew 4:23), and giving life to the dead. O that He would give life to those who are dead because of their heresy. He drove out demons (Matthew 9:33), sometimes Himself, sometimes by his disciples; He fed vast multitudes with a few loaves (Matthew 14:16-21). He walked dry-shod on seas (Matthew 14:25); He was betrayed and crucified, and crucifying with Himself my sin; He was offered as a Lamb, and offering as a Priest. as a Man buried in the grave, and as God rising again; and then ascending, and to come again in His own glory. Why what a multitude of high

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<sup>50</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, III, 11.

<sup>51</sup> Gregory the Theologian, *On the Theophany*, XXXVIII, 16.



festivals there are in each of the mysteries of the Christ; all of which have one completion, namely, my perfection and return to the first condition of Adam.”

## **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 8<sup>th</sup> 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 readings 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 (i.e. the Gentiles, from the Septuagint); 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**

**See p. 1963 ref to Titus**

**Revision D**

## **Epistles: 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 ridges<sup>52</sup>, 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. tsunamis) 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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<sup>52</sup> 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 loving kindness 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 (Isaiah 49:12, LXX). The Church Fathers have interpreted (Isaiah 49:12) as referring to the Magi coming from Persia. In this day of salvation, the Lord will comfort His people (Isaiah 49:13) and have compassion on them (Isaiah 49:10,13) as a nursing mother does her child (Isaiah 49:14-15). 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<sup>53</sup>: “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”.

“‘For the grace of God’, he says, ‘hath appeared, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world; looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ’. See, how together with the rewards he places the virtue. And this is of grace, to deliver us from worldly things, and to lead us to Heaven. He speaks here of two appearances; for there are two; the first of grace, the second of retribution and justice.

“‘That denying ungodliness’, he says, ‘and worldly lusts’. See here the foundation of all virtue. He has not said ‘avoiding’, but ‘denying’. Denying implies the greatest distance, the greatest hatred and aversion. With as much resolution and zeal as they turned from idols, with so much let them turn from vice itself, and worldly lusts. For these too are idols, that is, worldly lusts, and covetousness, and this he names idolatry. Whatever things are useful for the present life are worldly lusts, whatever things perish with the present life are worldly lusts. Let us then have nothing to do with these. Christ came, ‘that we should deny ungodliness’. Ungodliness relates to doctrines, worldly lusts to a wicked life.”

John Chrysostom pointed out<sup>54</sup> that unless we are born again, we are somewhere outside the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ intentionally spoke a little obscurely to render the people He addressed more attentive and to rouse them to ask questions. This was especially so for things that are spiritual and not carnal.

“Unless we are born again and receive the right doctrines, we are wandering somewhere outside, and are far from the Kingdom of heaven. But Christ does not speak so plainly as this. In order to make the saying easier to bear, He does not plainly direct it at Nicodemus, but speaks indefinitely, ‘Unless one is born again’ (John 3:3). He was all but saying, ‘both you and any other, who may have such opinions concerning Me, are somewhere outside the Kingdom’. Had He not spoken from a desire to establish this; His answer would have been suitable to what had been said. Now the Jews, if these words had been addressed to them, would have derided Him and departed; but Nicodemus shows his desire for instruction. And this is why in many places Christ speaks obscurely, because He wishes to rouse His hearers to ask questions, and to render them more attentive. For that which is said plainly often escapes the hearer, but what is obscure renders him more active and zealous. Now what He saith, is something like this: ‘If you are not born again, if you partake not of the Spirit which is by the washing of Regeneration, you cannot have a right opinion of Me. For the opinion which you have is not spiritual, but carnal’ (Titus 3:5). But He did not speak thus, as refusing to confound one who

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<sup>53</sup> John Chrysostom, Homily V, vv. 11-13.

<sup>54</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXIV, 2.

had brought such as he had, and who had spoken to the best of his ability; and He leads him unsuspectedly up to greater knowledge, saying, ‘Unless one is born again’. The word ‘again’, in this place, some understand to mean ‘from heaven’, others, ‘from the beginning’. ‘It is impossible’, said Christ, ‘for one not so born to see the Kingdom of God’; in this pointing to Himself, and declaring that there is another beside the natural sight, and that we have need of other eyes to behold Christ.”

John Chrysostom also gave<sup>55</sup> instructions to his catechumens every year around Pascha to prepare them for baptism. Baptism is referred to by different names, such as the laver of regeneration, illumination, burial, circumcision and the cross. There is also a reason why the catechumens come to the font dressed as they are: no shoes and just one garment. We come with just ourselves and we can’t hide behind fancy clothing.

“He who is about to approach the holy and dread mysteries must be awake and alert, must be clean from all cares of this life, full of much self-restraint, much readiness. He must banish from his mind every thought foreign to the mysteries, and on all sides cleanse and prepare his home, as if about to receive the king himself. Such is the preparation of your mind: such are your thoughts; such the purpose of your soul. Await therefore a return worthy of this most excellent decision from God, who overpowers with His recompense those who show forth obedience to Him. But since it is necessary for his fellow servants to contribute of their own, then we will contribute of our own; yea rather not even are these things our own, but these too are our Master’s. ‘What do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive *it*, why do you boast as if you had not received it?’ (1 Corinthians 4:7) I wished to say this first of all, why in the world our fathers, passing by the whole year, settled that the children of the Church should be initiated at this season? For what reason, after the instruction from us, removing your shoes and clothing, unclad and unshod, with but one garment on, they conduct you to hear the words of the exorcism. For it is not thoughtlessly and rashly that they have planned this dress and this season for us. But both these things have a certain mystic and secret reason. And I wished to say this to you. But I see that our discourse now constrains us to something more necessary. For it is necessary to say what baptism is, and for what reason it enters into our life, and what good things it conveys to us.”

“But, if you will, let us discourse about the name which this mystic cleansing bears: for its name is not one, but very many and various. For this purification is called the laver of regeneration. ‘According to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit’ (Titus 3:5). It is called also illumination, and this Paul again has called it, ‘But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings’ (Hebrews 10:32). And again, ‘For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance’ (Hebrews 6:4-6). It is

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<sup>55</sup> John Chrysostom, Instructions to Catechumens, I, 2.

called also, baptism: 'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ' (Galatians 3:27). It is called also burial: 'Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death' (Romans 6:4). It is called circumcision: 'In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ' (Colossians 2:11). It is called a cross: 'Our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin'" (Romans 6:6).

### **Following Salvation Comes the Holy Spirit**

Paul wrote, "But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:4-7).

We note that we are justified by two things: the washing of regeneration, which is Holy Baptism, and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, which is Holy Chrismation. If one is baptized but not chrismated, there is a question as to whether one has the gift of the Holy Spirit. Apollos, the Apostle of the Seventy, was able to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit through his great zeal, but the twelve followers of John the Baptist were not able to receive that<sup>56</sup>.

Clement of Alexandria stated<sup>57</sup> that the aim of Holy Baptism and Holy Chrismation was to obtain God's own special people. To the Jews, this was a stumbling block and to the Gentiles this was foolishness, but for different reasons. The Jews knew the prophecies, but didn't believe it when it happened. The Gentiles were looking for wisdom, and didn't believe it because it was too simple. God made it so simple that He made the wisdom of the world look foolish. In the end, everyone had their own choice.

'For Jews request a sign', in order to have faith; 'and Greeks seek after wisdom', plainly those reasonings styled 'irresistible'. 'But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block', because, though knowing prophecy, they did not believe the event. 'To the Greeks, foolishness' (1 Corinthians 1:22-23); for those who in their own estimation are wise, consider it mythical that the Son of God should speak by man and that God should have a Son, and especially that that Son should have suffered. This is why their preconceived idea inclines them to disbelieve. For the advent of the Savior did not make people foolish, hard of heart, and unbelieving, but made them understanding, amenable to persuasion, and believing. But those that would not believe, by separating themselves from the voluntary adherence of those who obeyed, were proved to be without understanding, unbelievers and fools. 'But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1 Corinthians 1:24). Should we not understand the words rendered, 'Has not God made foolish the

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<sup>56</sup> For further discussion of this, see the previous discussion on Acts 19, titled "The Legacy of John the Baptist's Baptism".

<sup>57</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, I, 18.



wisdom of the world?’ negatively: ‘God has made foolish the wisdom of the world?’ (1 Corinthians 1:25) So that the cause of their hardness of heart did not proceed from God, ‘making foolish the wisdom of the world’ (1 Corinthians 1:19-20). For on all accounts, being wise, they incur greater blame in not believing the proclamation. For the preference and choice of truth is voluntary. But that declaration, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise’, declares Him to have sent forth light, by bringing forth in opposition the despised and condemned barbarian philosophy. Just as the lamp, when shone upon by the sun, is said to be extinguished, on account of its not exerting the same power. All having been therefore called, those who are willing to obey have been named ‘called’. For there is no unrighteousness with God. Those of either race who have believed, are ‘His own special people’ (Titus 2:14). And in the Acts of the Apostles you will find this, word for word, ‘Then those who gladly received his word were baptized’ (Acts 2:41); but those who would not obey kept themselves aloof. To this prophecy says, ‘If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land’ (Isaiah 1:19) proving that choice or refusal depends on ourselves. Paul designates the doctrine which is according to the Lord, ‘the wisdom of God’ (1 Corinthians 1:21), in order to show that the true philosophy has been communicated by the Son. Further, he, who has a show of wisdom, has certain exhortations enjoined on him. ‘Put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away lying, *Let each one of you* speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another’ (Ephesians 4:24-25). Nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need’ (Ephesians 4:27-28). To work is to labor in seeking the truth; for it is accompanied with rational well doing, both of worldly wealth and of divine wisdom. For he wishes both that the word be taught, and that the money be put into the bank, accurately tested, to accumulate interest. Whence he adds, ‘Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers’ (Ephesians 4:29).

Ambrose of Milan showed how<sup>58</sup> the calling of the Gentiles was similar to that of Cornelius. The Holy Spirit called the Church exactly like the Father and the Son did. The Gentiles were like wild beasts before they were called, but their calling has turned them away from their wildness by the operation of the Spirit and are justified them by His grace.

“Then, again, because the Angel is sent to Cornelius, the Holy Spirit speaks to Peter: ‘My eyes *shall be* on the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me (Psalm 101:6). Nor is it without a purpose that when He had said before, ‘A voice *spoke* to him again the second time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common”’ (Acts 10:15). The Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles to purify them, when it is manifest that the operation of the Spirit is a divine operation. But Peter, when sent by the Spirit, did not wait for the command of God the Father, but acknowledged that that message was from the Spirit Himself, and the grace that of the Spirit Himself. He said: ‘If, then, God has granted them the same grace as to us, who was I that I should resist God?’”

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<sup>58</sup> Ambrose of Milan, On the Holy Spirit, II, x, 106-109.

“It is, then, the Holy Spirit Who has delivered us from that Gentile impurity. For in those kinds of four-footed creatures and wild beasts and birds there was a figure of the condition of man, which appears clothed with the bestial ferocity of wild beasts unless it grows gentle by the sanctification of the Spirit. Excellent, then, is that grace which changes the rage of beasts into the simplicity of the Spirit: ‘For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, He saved us, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life’” (Titus 3:3-7).

“Therefore, the holy prophet David, seeing in the Spirit that we should from wild beasts become like the dwellers in heaven, says, ‘Rebuke the wild beasts of the wood’ (Psalm 68:30). He signified, not the wood disturbed by the running of wild beasts, and shaken with the roaring of animals, but that wood of which it is written: ‘Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; we found it in the fields of the woods (Psalm 132:6). In which, as the prophet said: ‘The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon’ (Psalm 92:12). That wood which, shaken in the tops of the trees spoken of in prophecy, shed forth the nourishment of the heavenly Word. That wood into which Paul entered indeed as a ravening wolf, but went forth as a shepherd, for ‘Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world’” Psalm 19:4).

“We then were wild beasts, and therefore the Lord said: ‘Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves’ (Matthew 7:15). But now, through the Holy Spirit, the rage of lions, the spots of leopards, the craft of foxes, the rapacity of wolves, have passed away from our feelings. Great, then, is the grace which has changed earth to heaven. ‘For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ’” (Philippians 3:20).

Grace, Paul says, teaches us:

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

Grace had already taught us:

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

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

John Chrysostom comments<sup>59</sup> 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”.

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

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<sup>59</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, X, vv. 3-4

## **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 creature<sup>60</sup>. 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).

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<sup>60</sup> 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 I; 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 as 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 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. 3<sup>rd</sup> Hour, 6<sup>th</sup> Hour and 9<sup>th</sup> Hour Prayers were customary for David (Psalm 55:17), where 3<sup>rd</sup> Hour and 9<sup>th</sup> 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 9<sup>th</sup> Hour Prayers (Acts 3:1), Peter away from home at 6<sup>th</sup> Hour Prayers (Acts 10:9), and Cornelius at 9<sup>th</sup> 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 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 fall with David and will **not** 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).