



WEEKLY BULLETIN

BULLETIN BUILDER

Assumption Greek Orthodox Church

January 10th, 2021: Sunday After Holy Epiphany / Vasilopita Sunday

MARTYRS: Neolina, Domnina, Parthena

SAINTS: Gregory of Nyssa; **Dometian**, Bhp of Melitene; **Theosevia** the Deaconess, sister of St. Basil the Great; **Markianos**, Priest and Oikonomos; **Antypas** from Athos; **Makarios & Pavlos** from Russia, **St. Basil's family**

Following the Divine Liturgy, please stay in your pews for our annual **Vasilopita party**, sponsored by Philoptochos and PC

ANNOUNCEMENTS

January Food Fest: Saturday, January 30, 2021, pre-order only. Drive up, from 11:30 am to 2:00 pm

See details and place your order at: www.foodfest.assumptionnh.org

House Blessings: Please contact our office or Fr. Gregory to have your house or workplace blessed

Prayer to the Mother of God (Paraklesis): Wednesday, January 13th, 4:00 PM

St. Anthony: Sunday, January 17th, Orthros 9:00 AM, Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM

St. Athanasios: Monday, January 18th, Orthros 9:00 AM, Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM

Gospel and Epistle Readings

Matins Gospel Reading – *Ninth Orthros Gospel - John 20:19-31*

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them: "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him: "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them: "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said: "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

Epistle Reading – *St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 4:7-13*

BRETHREN, grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, it is said, "When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (in saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Gospel Reading – *Sunday after Epiphany - Matthew 4:12-17*

At that time, when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth he went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." AMEN.

Wisdom of the Fathers

Repentance is the renewal of baptism and is a contract with God for a fresh start in life.

St. John Climacus - Ladder of Divine Ascent Step 5: On Penitence, Paulist Press pg. 121, 6th century

The Three-Step Program to our Salvation

After His Holy Baptism and the arrest of St. John the Baptist, our Lord moves to pagan territory away from Judea and starts His public ministry. This in itself fulfills another prophecy of Isaiah, that is, the Messiah will appear across from Jordan, towards the sea. And then Isaiah goes on to pinpoint exactly Galilee and does so 800 years before the birth of Christ!

It is also notable the Lord starts His preaching with the same exact phrase as the main teaching of St. John: "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**" Same call, but with a big difference. When St. John warned the Kingdom is at hand, he meant it is near, whereas when the Lord repeated it, He meant it is already here. This may appear small on the surface. However, theologically it has a tremendous importance! This is because once the Messiah is revealed, and after He is Resurrected and has Ascended, an awesome clock of God's creation begins ticking. This clock, which only the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity can see, counts **the Last Days (or Eschaton)**, or otherwise the final act of the Divine Plan for man's salvation. During these Last Days, mankind is given the opportunity to believe in Christ and be saved, or not believe and face the consequences. For that matter, the Lord's first commandment today, is also His last one just before he ascended. He said: "**Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in My name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem**" (Luke 24:47).

It is obvious then, this Kingdom at hand (the one drawing near) is tightly connected with **repentance**. Repentance was not only the first and last commandment of our Lord's earthly ministry, was not only the singular message of the Baptist, but it was also preached by all Old Testament Prophets! Repentance is also constantly repeated directly or indirectly in all the Lord's parables and miracles. Together with His power, He also uses many symbols and metaphors to get across one point: "To be part of the Kingdom of Heaven, you need to change your ways, your priorities and your values - you need to make a radical turn towards God. All of you spending most of your time on worldly cares, putting off for later the effort for your salvation, think again! Pay more attention to the words of my Gospel! Read them daily! Take action on them! Keep the Commandments! And when you fail, repent and ask for forgiveness from those I have assigned to grant remittance of sins."

Repentance is then the very first step towards buying real estate in God's Kingdom, the first step towards our salvation!

"All things are vanity" (Eccl. 12:8). The only thing of true value we ever collect while passing from this life is **the knowledge of the true God, through our communion with His Son and our illumination by His Holy Spirit**. This now is the second step towards our salvation and it is called "**illumination**." The feast of Holy Epiphany in Greek is called "Fota" (Lights), which is loosely translated to "illumination." This is why we often wish one another "Kali Fotisi" (become illuminated)! Illumination is closely related with the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, who came and stood over the head of Christ during Epiphany and illuminated the world. It is also the same Holy Spirit which appeared and illuminated the Holy Apostles and those with them on the day of Pentecost. The halo around the heads of our Lord, the All-Holy Mother of God (Panagia Theotokos) and the Saints, is nothing more than a visual representation of this illumination – the very presence of the Holy Spirit. This is what led St. Seraphim of Sarov to proclaim "**The goal of our lives is to receive the Holy Spirit.**"

Finally, the presence of the Holy Spirit inside of us leads to our **sanctification**, the third step to our salvation. The Holy Spirit cannot land on anything unclean. It is like the dove Noah sent from the Ark, which came back to him because there was no clean place to land on. So, it is impossible to receive the Holy Spirit if the household of our soul is not sparkling clean from all kinds of sin. And how many blessings does the Holy Spirit bring! St. Paul describes the gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1-Corinthians 12:8, but most importantly in Galatians 5. "**The fruits of the Holy Spirit are love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.... They come to those who belong to Christ Jesus and have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires**" (Gal 5:22-24).

My Christian brothers and sisters, the program of our salvation has been clearly laid out in front of us by our Lord, His Holy Disciples, His Saints and His Prophets: **1) Repentance, 2) Illumination, 3) Sanctification**. Most of us, and first of all myself, have not yet begun with the first step! Our Lord, who is kind and understanding of our weak human nature, urges us in today's gospel to make that first step, to get started! **Repent, He says!** With the coming of the New Year, let us all make a new beginning! Let's decide to change our lives, starting with repenting for our mistakes and asking for forgiveness of sins in the manner the Lord has prescribed in **Matthew 16:19** and not in some other way we are thinking is right. Repenting secretly in our hearts and in front of an icon is a good beginning. However, receiving **forgiveness of sins does not come from an icon**, same way an icon cannot baptize us, marry us, or give us Holy Communion! Forgiveness of sins always involves a priest!
AMEN.