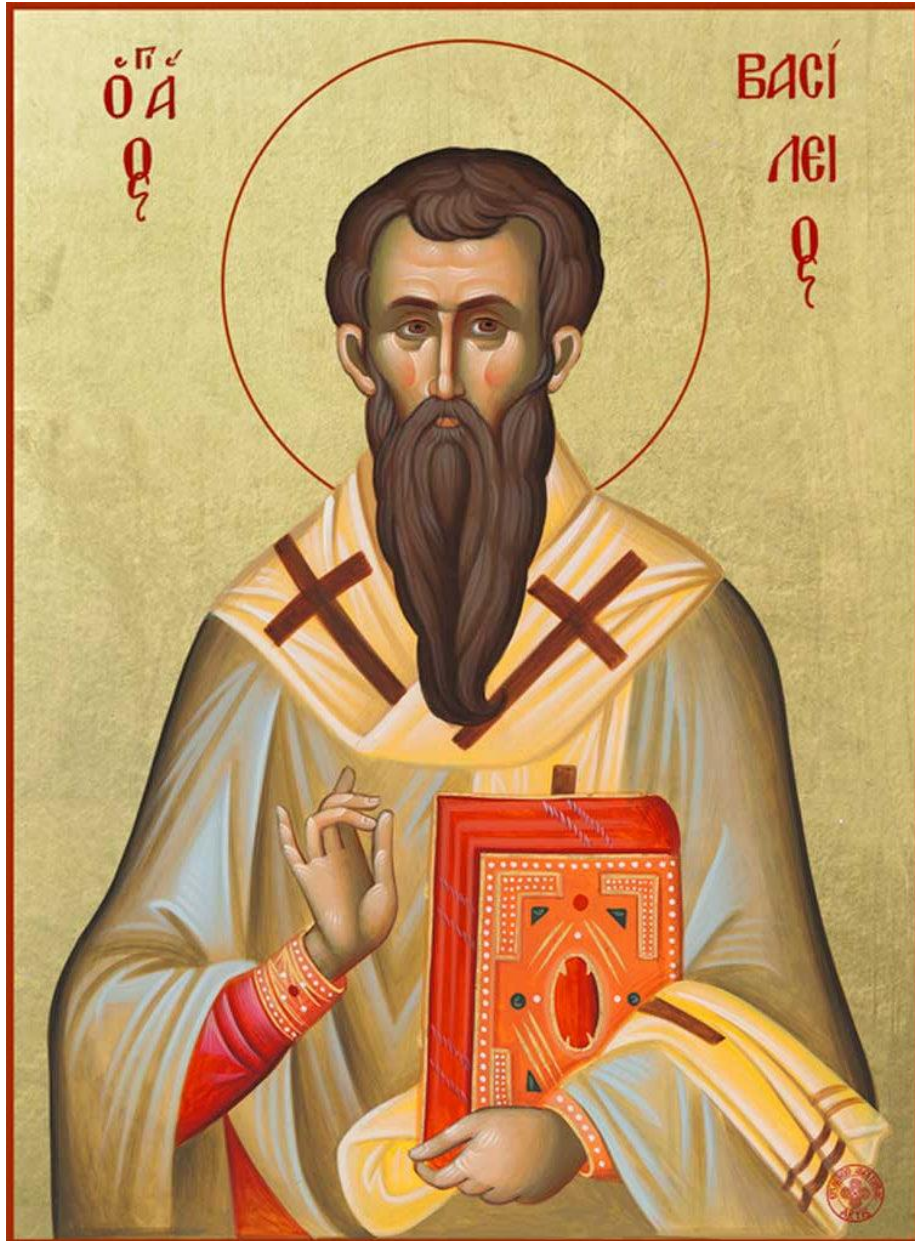


**St Ignatios of Antioch
Melkite Greek Catholic Church
1003 Merry Street
Augusta, Georgia 30904
706 364-6219**



**Sunday before Theophany
31 December 2023**

The Sunday before Theophany



From Bethlehem to the Jordan

WHILE OUR SECULAR, COMMERCIAL culture all but sees December 26 as the end of the Christmas season, for the Church the festive season is just beginning. We continue to observe the fabled “12 days of Christmas” – one day just isn’t enough to commemorate the presence of God among us.

The Feast of the Nativity is observed for the rest of December, culminating with the Feast of the Circumcision of Christ on the eighth day (January 1). Then we begin the time of preparation for the Feast of the Theophany.

In our Church this period from Christmas to Theophany is a festive time, free from fasting in contrast to the previous weeks of fasting. And as the “last and greatest day” of the paschal feast is Pentecost, so too the last and greatest day of our festival is the celebration of Christ’s epiphany at the Jordan: the holy Theophany of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ.

In highlighting the birth of Christ the Church focuses on the Word of God setting aside His divine glory to identify with us. He “...*made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men*” (Philippians 2:7). At the Theophany, however, we see the power of God manifested at Jesus’ baptism. In His emerging public ministry we see that power at work, bringing healing and forgiveness as a sign of the ultimate healing of mankind which will be brought about at the cross.

The Gospel portrays John the Forerunner as promising the coming of One who “*will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*” He will not simply come; He will act. And so while our Christmas celebration focuses on Christ’s coming *in the flesh*; the Theophany celebrates His coming *in power*. The Scriptures call it an *epiphany*: an appearance or public manifestation before the people of Israel. Christmas sets forth for us the incarnation in the flesh: God becoming human in Christ, and His self-abasement in doing so. The Theophany highlights His presence in power among sinners, to take away the sin of the world.

Our Church has come to call this event a **theophany** – a divine epiphany – because it was the first public appearance of Christ’s divinity. Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, is affirmed by the voice of the Father and the Spirit in the form of a dove. This event, a manifestation of “*the grace of God that brings salvation to all*” (Titus 2:11), is the first epiphany of the Holy Trinity.

The Theophany, as might be expected, was one of the baptismal feasts of the early Church: a day when newly-baptized believers would be initiated into the worshipping community. Since witnessing a baptism should always remind us of our own, the Church selects this passage from St Paul’s Epistle to Titus for this feast: “...*according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit... that we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life*” (Titus 3:5,7). We are reminded that we have tasted the fruit of Christ’s coming in baptism and chrismation, and have become heirs of the kingdom to come.

Both of these feasts evoke yet another epiphany, one still to come: Christ’s manifestation *in glory* as Judge. While the Gospel readings for the season focus on the events surrounding Christ’s theophany, the Epistle readings point to its consequences for our life. St Paul affirms that Christ will give the crown of righteousness on that day “*to all who have loved His appearing [epiphanean]*” (2 Timothy 4:8). For this reason we are called, first of all, to live “*soberly, righteously and devoutly in the present age*” (Titus 2:12) – *sophronos, kai dikaios kai evsovos*.

First of all, our love for Christ among us is reflected in our living *soberly*. *Sophronos* does not mean morosely, gloomily, but moderately, with self-restraint. It is a human virtue prized by the ancients long before Christ. To live prudently is to be self-controlled, without excess or extravagance. Living in moderation speaks about the way we see ourselves in the world: not simply as consumers of goods and entertainment, but as people for whom the inner life predominates. It is a precondition, as it were, for living a Christian life.

To live *righteously* speaks of the way we conduct our relations with others. “Righteousness” in the Scriptures refers, not to justice in the legal sense, but to living in a manner that reflects God’s way for us. It is the path of those who keep the commandments, whose actions reflect the love for neighbor preached by Christ.

Finally we are reminded to express our relationship to God by living *devoutly*. From its earliest days – based upon earlier Jewish practices – Christians have been enjoined to mark the passing of each day

with the worship of God. If circumstances allow, we are to join with others in worship; if they do not, we can and should worship alone. Such regularity in worship reminds us that we are being blessed by God our Creator and Redeemer “at all times, at every hour.”

We respond to Christ’s coming in the flesh and in power as well as His ultimate coming in glory by a life of moderation, of love of neighbor and of honor to God in all things.

Leaving Bethlehem in spirit, and turning to the Jordan with Christ, come, all you families of the nations, let us sing to Him with a pure heart and lips. Let us say in faith, “Blessed is Your coming, O our God: glory to You!”

Radiant was the Feast that passed – and more radiant yet is the Feast that comes.

An angel announced the first; a Forerunner preaches the second. In the first, Bethlehem weeps because of the blood poured out as it was deprived of its infants; in the second, the waters are blessed and the baptismal fonts bring about the rebirth of countless children.

Formerly, a star revealed You to the wise men; now the Father reveals You to the world. O Savior who took flesh and now comes to manifest Yourself, O Lord, glory to You!

Vespers, Sunday before Theophany

THIS COMING WEEKEND IS THE FEAST OF THEOPHANY – This Friday evening, the 5th, at 6pm will be Great Vespers for the Feast and the Great Blessing of Water. Saturday, the 6th, we will have Divine Liturgy at 9am. Bring your holy water bottles to refill them!

CONTRIBUTE TO OUR NON-PERISHABLE FOOD DRIVE by placing your donations in the designated area in the Parish Hall (green cardboard box) or coordinate with Ms. Barbara (bzmijewski@yahoo.com), ensuring your generous contributions make a meaningful impact to those in need.

Sunday Collections

Attendance	Date	Collection
37	5 November 2023	\$459.00
39	12 November 2023	\$375.00
35	19 November 2023	\$35.00
25	26 November 2023	\$3,360.00
49	3 December 2023	\$1,605.00
39	10 December 2023	\$672.00
47	17 December 2023	
21	24 December 2023	6530.00

Divine Liturgy Intentions:

For the Living:

Bishop Francois, Fr. John Azar, Fr. James Graham, Fr. Michael Copenhagen, David Mangelsdorf, Brian Frank, Nookid Graham, Ali de la Vega, Dn. Kent & Diana Plowman, Mandie, Nick Baiad, Charlie & Kathleen Barnette, Alfonso de la Vega, Michael A Skrocki, Medical Personnel and First Responders

For Amy & Philip Crandal on their 24th Anniversary!

For the Dead:

Announcements

We are live-streaming on our Facebook page at the following days & times:

Monday, Wednesday, Friday – 8:00AM, The Third Hour

Friday – 6:00 PM Weekday Vespers

Saturday – 6:00PM Great Vespers

Sunday – 9:00AM Orthros & 10:00AM Divine Liturgy

JOIN US IN PRAYING the 3rd Hour on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 8am. This is a short prayer service from our version of the Liturgy of the Hours. It lasts less than 20 minutes or so. Come join us!

PRAYER OPPORTUNITES AROUND TOWN –Most Holy Trinity parish will be hosting a Men's Holy Hour every Friday morning from 6-7am. There will also be a coffee hour and reflection time afterwards – Men from all parishes are invited to attend

for whatever portion of the time they are available. For the Ladies – St. Joseph’s will be hosting a Women’s Holy Hour on the first Monday of each month at 7pm.

Resurrectional Troparion

(Tone 6)



Let us, O faith - ful, praise and wor-ship the Word,



co-e-ter-nal with the Fa-ther and the Spi - rit, born of the



Vir - gin for our sal - va - tion, for He was



pleased to be lif - ted in the flesh up - on the Cross and



to en-dure death and to raise the dead by His



glo-ri-ous Res-sur - rec - tion.

Troparion of St. Joseph



O Jo - seph pro-claim to Da - vid the an-ces-tor of



Christ the great mi-ra-cles you have wit - nessed:



You have seen the Vir - gin with Child, gi - ven



praise with the shep - herds and a-dored with the Wise



Men, and the an-gel of the Lord has ap - peared to you.



In-ter - cede with Christ God that He may save



our souls.

Christmas Kondakion

(Dec. 25-31)

(Tone 3)



To-day the Vir - gin gives birth to the Tran-scen-dent



in Es - sence, and the earth pre-sents a cave to



the In-ac - ces - si - ble. The an - gels with the



shep - herds sing His glo - ry, and the Wise Men



with the Star tra - vel on their way, for to us is



born a New Child, who is God from all e - ter -



- ni - ty.

Prokimenon

Reader: O Lord, save your people and bless your inheritance.

All: O Lord, save your people and bless your inheritance.

Reader: To you, O Lord, I have called: O my Rock, be not deaf to me!

All: O Lord, save your people and bless your inheritance.

Reader: O Lord, save your people,

All: And bless your inheritance.

Saints of the Week:

Dec. 31: Leave-Taking of Christmas; Venerable Melania the Roman; Holy Zoticus, feeder of Orphans
Jan. 1: Feast of the Circumcision of our Lord; St. Basil the Great
Jan. 2: Preparation for the Feast of Theophany; Sylvester, Pope of Rome
Jan. 3: 2 nd Day of the Preparation; Holy Prophet Malachy; Holy Martyr Gordios
Jan. 4: 3 rd Day of the Preparation; Synaxis of the 70 Apostles; Holy Father Theoctistos, Abbot of the Monastery of Cucume in Sicily
Jan. 5: Paramony of Theophany; commemoration of the Holy Martyrs Theopemptos and Theonas; Venerable Mother Syncletica
Jan. 6: Theophany of our Lord
Jan. 7: 2 nd Day of Theophany; Synaxis of John the Baptist

Word Search

D	E	P	S	Z	C	Y	J	Y	I	Y	A	W	S	S	E	M	V	I	C
J	U	H	B	H	D	A	D	B	G	D	P	R	E	A	C	H	I	N	G
B	Q	L	E	A	T	H	E	R	K	P	I	S	G	S	I	L	U	J	O
E	Z	O	E	J	Q	A	L	E	M	A	C	V	V	M	O	A	A	L	Q
G	M	R	Y	H	K	C	P	D	J	C	J	X	Z	D	V	I	C	E	O
I	L	O	S	I	N	S	D	Z	B	A	P	T	I	Z	I	N	G	P	M
N	C	O	I	V	S	Z	B	H	O	N	E	Y	D	S	S	M	B	S	U
N	O	B	R	R	E	P	E	N	T	A	N	C	E	T	J	D	N	O	S
I	N	B	T	D	Z	X	W	C	E	G	Y	Z	E	X	S	I	X	G	H
N	F	W	R	I	T	T	E	N	T	U	I	H	Y	Q	Y	R	A	X	J
G	E	D	V	S	Y	H	E	L	E	D	P	H	L	V	Q	J	W	O	R
K	S	E	E	S	I	X	P	R	H	O	M	G	D	O	B	B	R	U	U
W	S	S	Y	B	D	E	A	C	R	E	D	F	N	H	C	D	Q	W	L
T	I	E	E	M	C	P	I	P	K	B	I	A	E	E	A	U	Y	Z	S
S	N	R	P	K	E	Y	H	E	R	S	O	P	S	N	D	M	S	E	I
N	G	T	J	R	U	U	R	F	P	A	R	T	S	L	T	W	P	T	J
W	S	O	P	B	S	L	A	D	N	A	S	D	L	O	H	E	B	I	S
H	H	M	E	S	S	E	N	G	E	R	Q	P	F	T	Q	E	R	F	S
N	N	K	U	A	G	F	L	S	S	E	N	E	V	I	G	R	O	F	G
J	I	S	T	R	A	I	G	H	T	N	M	T	E	X	U	E	D	N	Z

Baptizing
 Beginning
 Behold
 Camel
 Confessing
 Desert
 Forgiveness
 Gospel
 Honey
 John

Jordan
 Leather
 Locusts
 Lord
 Messenger
 Paths
 Preaching
 Prepare
 Prophets
 Ready

Repentance
 Sandals
 Send
 Sins
 Straight
 Strap
 Voice
 Way
 Written

Parish Information:

Rt. Rev. Michael Skrocki, JCD
Pastor

abounamike@aol.com

Knights of Columbus
JFK Council

1st Wednesday of the month, 7pm
Most Holy Trinity

4th Degree Assembly
2nd Wednesday of the month, 7pm
St. Ignatios

Publicans Prayer Group
Postponed until Further Notice

New Parishioners:
Please register with Fr. Michael.

Mystery of Holy Confession
Please contact Fr. Michael to set up a convenient time.

Mystery of Christian Initiation
Expectant parents should notify Fr. Michael prior to the birth of the child. Adult converts should contact Fr. Michael so arrangements may be made for any necessary instruction and sacraments.

Mystery of Holy Crowning
Those planning to marry should notify the Fr. Michael
at least six months prior to the desired Wedding date.

Mystery of Holy Anointing
Please notify Fr. Michael when you or a family member is in need of anointing.

To report sexual abuse by clergy, parish personnel or volunteers of the Eparchy of Newton, please call the **Victim Assistance Coordinator** at 1-800-479-5910.