

THE ORTHODOX MESSENGER

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THE FEAST OF THE HUMILITY OF GOD

ACCORDING to the Evangelist Luke, on the eighth day from the birth of the Lord, the Righteous Joseph and the Virgin Mary fulfilled the Mosaic commandment to circumcise a boy. The sacred Evangelist briefly describes the event by writing that “the days for the Child to be circumcised were fulfilled, and His name was called Jesus, the name called by the angel before He was conceived in the womb” (Luke 2:21). In this ceremony of naming and circumcision, the Church proclaims the real and full human nature of the Child. Theologically we would say that Jesus harmoniously united the two natures (human and divine). In other words, He became a God-man (Theanthropos): fully man, fully divine, not a hybrid, since it was a union of the two natures in the person of the Son of God. We rejoice to proclaim the incarnation, because when we are baptized we are united to Christ—we become members of His Body, which is the Church—and through this union our salvation is effected by faith, repentance and the keeping of the commandments.

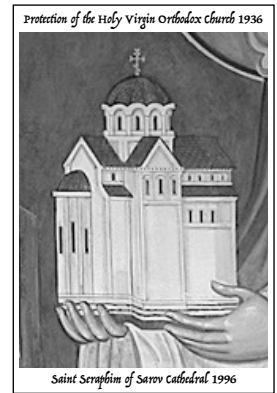
The Feast of the Circumcision also emphasizes, like Nativity and Theophany, the inconceivable humility of the Son of God: “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in the fashion of a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death—even the death of the cross. Therefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:6...11).

God’s immeasurable love for His mankind—which we behold in all of Christ’s life—is the greatest scandal of all ages. The ancient Greek axiom “God does not mix with humans,” and the reality of God becoming man, is

foolishness to the so-called wisdom of the world. However, the goodness and philanthropy of God exceeded all divisions with humanity. He made the great movement and humbled His Son and made Him a human, in order to save the human race. He descended to the human predicament, down to the condition of death even in order to resurrect man from the condition of spiritual deadness and to lift man to the heavens of His throne.

During all the time the incarnated Word was on earth, simultaneously as God He was also in heaven. He was everywhere, as in “everywhere present,” because with the adoption of human nature He did not put off His divine nature. He saves as true God because He became true man. He fully assumed our human nature and in that union, heals it. Every departure from this truth comprises a heresy for our Church. Nestorianism had denied Christ’s divine nature and Monophysitism had denied Christ’s human nature.

The event of the divine Incarnation is the basis of faith, and the joy and treasure of every believing Christian. We should not have the slightest doubt that “Our Savior visited us from on high” to deliver us from the slavery to sin and corruption and death. According to the wonderful hymnography of the feast of the Circumcision *The Savior condescending to the race of humans accepted to be wrapped in swaddling clothes. He did not abhor the circumcision of the flesh who was eight days old by the Mother and unbegotten by the Father for our salvation.* He came toward us so that we may draw near to Him, for Him to save us, to glorify us and to make us inheritors of His unending Kingdom. We need to escape from the noetic bonds of the sinful world, our persistent anxieties and compulsions, and lift up our mind to the heavens. Only thus will we be benefited from the gifts of divine condescension. —*adapted*



- **5 PM, Sunday, Dec. 31:** Vespers, Feast of the Circumcision of Christ/St. Basil the Great
- **10 AM, Monday, Jan. 1:** Divine Liturgy / Cutting of the Vasilopita (St. Basil Bread)

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PREPARATION FOR THEOPHANY

THE CHURCH TYPIKON (order of Church services) tells us that like Nativity, the Feast of Theophany (Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan) also has “prefestal days” in which we sing hymns preparing us for Theophany, and our own integration into that enlightenment. When the Lord was baptized by St. John, we discern that at least three important events. First, in humbly submitting Himself to Baptism, the Sinless Son of God identified Himself with sinners, with us. Secondly, there is the astounding revelation of the Holy Trinity, made manifest with the Divine Voice of the Father, the Spirit in the “form” of a dove, and the Beloved Son Jesus. Thirdly, when the Savior entered the water of the Jordan River, He restored nature itself itself. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann teaches us:

“In this celebration water becomes what it was on the first day of Creation, when ‘the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters’ (Gen 1:2). The words of the service echo this in praise and thanksgiving: ‘Great art Thou, O Lord, and marvelous are Thy works, and there are no words which sufficeth to hymn Thy wonders...’ Once again, humanity stands before the mystery of existence. Once again, we experience the world joyfully and we see its

beauty and harmony as God’s gift. Once again we give thanks. And in this thanksgiving, praise and joy we once again become genuine human beings.

The joy of Epiphany is in the recovery of a cosmic experience of the world, of recovering faith that everything and everyone can always be washed, purified, renewed, reborn and that regardless of how dirty and clouded with mud our life has become, no matter what swamp we might have rolled in, we always have access to a purifying stream of living water, because humanity’s thirst for heaven, goodness, perfection and beauty is not dead, nor can it ever die. Indeed, this thirst alone makes us human beings. ...Who said Christianity is depressing and grim, morbid and sad, and pulls human beings away from life? Look at the faces of worshippers that night and see the light and joy that shines as they listen to the psalm thundering its exultation, “The voice of the Lord is upon the waters” (Ps 29:3), as they watch the priest sprinkling volleys of blessed water throughout the church and those glittering drops fly as if throughout the whole world, making that world once again a possibility and a promise, the raw material for a mysterious miracle of transformation and transfiguration.

God Himself entered this water in the form of a man; He united Himself not only with humanity, but also with all matter and made all of it a radiant, light-bearing stream flowing towards life and joy. But none of this can be experienced or sensed without repentance, without a deep change of consciousness, without the conversion of mind and heart, without the ability to see everything in a new light. This was precisely the repentance John the Baptist preached and which made it possible to see Jesus approaching the river Jordan and lovingly accept Him as God Himself who from the beginning of time loved the human race and created the whole world for us as an image of His love, eternity and joy.” 🍷

THEOPHANY SERVICES

- **6 PM, Thursday, January 4:** Royal Hours for Theophany
- **6:15 PM, Friday, January 5:** Matins for the Feast
- **9:30 AM, Saturday, January 6:** Divine Liturgy, and Great Blessing of Water
- **10 AM, Sunday, January 7:** Divine Liturgy, Feast of the Synaxis of St. John the Baptist and second Great Blessing of Water

BUILDING RESILIENCY

As a preamble to the talk I gave on Oct. 13, 2017, I felt a short theological context would be helpful. As an iconographer for the past three and a half decades, I have spent a great deal of time meditating on the theology of icons, which is based on our uniquely Orthodox understanding of the body and of deification. Deification is the process of acquiring grace, the Divine energies of God, in an embodied way. We paint grace-filled people, the Saints, in the icons. We believe that we too can experience this grace, our bodies included. God, in His love for us, and His creation, chose to take on human nature, a human soul and a human body. Orthodox Christianity is “the one religion that values the body most of all”, (Theology of the Body by Jean-Claude Larchet, p. 11). We don’t just have a body; we are a body. Our bodies cannot be reduced to a kind of mechanical materialism. They are united with our soul, made in God’s image, and are a dimension of our personhood (Larchet, pp. 16, 21, 23). That means that our central nervous systems are not some separate part of ourselves, but are held in this much greater context. Working with our central nervous systems is indeed, working with our very selves. Since we are baptized and have been made temples of the Holy Spirit, working with our bodies holds the possibility of transformation, not just “fixing something that’s broken.” St. Paul says we are “sown a natural body,” and “raised a spiritual body”(I Cor 15.44). The long-term intention, for Orthodox people in therapeutically working with our bodies, is to enable spiritual transformation and deification.

I am Lukia Rose. Fr. Lawrence has asked me to speak briefly on PTSD. I am not a body worker or a therapist. I have personal experience with a form of somatic work created by an expert on trauma named Peter A. Levine, PhD. His work is now being used worldwide to deal with trauma in all kinds of situations, including with natural disasters.

The fires have traumatized all of us in our county. We have needed to flee for our lives or have packed our bags to be ready to go. However, we will not all necessarily get PTSD from this experience. PTSD is primarily a chronic dysregulation of the central nervous system. Certainly, what happens and how we feel and think about it are involved, but fundamentally, trauma is a dynamic within our nervous system. There are now specific ways to work with our central nervous systems to make sure that our experiences of trauma do not become full-blown syndromes. It is important to know that there is a difference between a single one-time shock to our system that wakes up our fight or flight response, and an

on-going experience of trauma where our instinctive response is activated repeatedly. This week [the week of the fire] we have had this second type of activation. Because of this, it is especially important to pay attention to coming back out of activation into a sense of calm in our bodies.

The activation from perceived and real threat shows up as constriction of muscles, shortness of breath, looping memories, panic and vigilance. Settling or calm shows up as softening of muscles, deeper breathing, being oriented in space and time, and a sense of expansion in our bodies. It is healthy and normal for us to be shifting between high alert and calm. This movement up to anxiety and then down toward settled is actually critical to not getting PTSD. When our bodies can do this movement it is called resiliency. When we get stuck on high alert or stuck in immobilization, then we are less resilient, less able to avoid PTSD, and may need some bodywork to help restore central nervous system resiliency.

There are many body-based practices that can help us move toward calm. You may already be using some of your own. It only takes 10 seconds of focused attention on our body to make this shift begin to happen. I will share one such practice with you now. [At the time of the talk, I shared two practices, but only one is explained here. For those who were not there and are now reading this talk for the first time, please take the time to experiment slowly with this practice. Reading about and thinking about our bodies does not actually touch our central nervous systems. The following practice is on the level of “first-aid” and should not create any difficulties, but if you do encounter any, just stop. Please also feel free to contact me.]

First, sit down on a chair and get comfortable. Stretch both your arms out in front of your torso, parallel to each other, like you are going to lift up something with both hands from a shoulder-high shelf. Now put your right hand up into your left armpit and hold your armpit snugly but gently. Place your left hand (the free one) gently on top of your right upper arm. You will be in a kind of cross-armed embrace of your upper body.

Sit in this position and shift your attention to the sensations of your body. What are you noticing first? Do

your hands know where they are? Does your armpit sense pressure from the holding? Is it too much or too little? Can you adjust to make it feel right? Do you feel warmth anywhere? Coolness anywhere? What is happening with your breathing? Is there any change with the muscles in your chest? Can you feel your heart beating? Is it beating fast? Is it changing? Do you notice your heart area? Do you feel contained? Do you feel any other part of your body, like your legs or feet? Can you feel the ground under your feet? The language of the body is different than the language of the mind. It is sensation only. Set aside all judgment or quantifying of what you are sensing. We are practicing simply noticing what is going on with your body and noticing what happens holding this position. Now release, but keep your attention on your body.

Our embodied instincts and sensations live in the present moment only. So when we work with them, we are more in the present too. Our spiritual aim is to reside in the Kingdom of God, which is the Eternal Now. So our bodies, when used properly, can support our spiritual efforts to be in the present. Noticing the sensations of our bodies is our somatic intelligence. Noticing how we feel emotionally is our emotional intelligence. When our hearts inform our minds, we have healthy mental intelligence. Our intuition is the beginning of noetic intelligence. Accessing and using any of these capacities consciously requires being present and calm.

It turns out that our central nervous systems are intimately interconnected with other people and mammals. Many of us know from experience that when we are calming a crying baby, we have more success when we ourselves are calm. This is also true in a disaster. The more one person shifts back down toward calm, the easier it is for others to receive these non-verbal cues and settle a

bit too. Trauma, and this disaster in particular, tends to strip us of any illusion that life is safe. Fortunately, we do live in relative safety, so we have the space to practice getting back to calm. Practicing with our own bodies means we offer a measure of calm to each other also.

In the practice we just did, we allowed our focus to be on the unique sensations of one area of our body at a time. As we start listening to our bodies we notice that our bodies are sharing back with us. This relational dynamic helps us replace the common assumption that our bodies are objects. Indeed, we are not. We are profoundly relational subjects, including our bodies. God has designed us this way in order for us to become loving and relational people. By not objectifying ourselves, we are less likely to objectify others. Additionally, listening to the language of bodily sensation means we are practicing being outside our quantifying, judgmental, and controlling mind. When we decrease distraction, and practice instead a simple way of paying attention, then we become open to the relational quality of reality and to God. We might perceive there is depth and interconnectivity everywhere. We might even get a hint of our unique place in this dynamic universe. Our minds alone cannot do this, and we cannot do this when we are activated by trauma.

All of this is a lot to consider when what is needed right now is to keep coming back to being settled in our body during a disaster. However, working with trauma has many spiritual ramifications. Even on the Cross, our Savior lived embodied peace. Christ apparently has the most resilient central nervous system ever, capable of handling all disasters and all suffering. I hope we can now sense a little bit in our own bodies what He longs to give us in a full way each time we receive His precious Body at the Chalice. 🕊

ANNUAL MEETING

Due to scheduling conflicts, the General Parish Meeting will be held on **Sunday, February 11** (rather than on the first Sunday of February as the Bylaws stipulate). Topics include: review of the 2017 finances, adoption of the 2018 budget, reports from the Sisterhood, Church School, Rector, Parish Ministries, Sacraments. We will vote for Parish Council members, discuss fundraisers, e.g. a scaled down Glendi or no Glendi, and if so, and what to do with our Glendi equipment. The Meeting will begin at 12:30 PM on Sunday, February 11. If you would like to nominate yourself or someone else for Parish Council, please do that with a Parish Council Member no later than Sunday, January 21. Report booklets will be distributed on Sunday, January 28.

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **SAINT SERAPHIM DAY, JAN. 2:** We celebrate the second of our Annual Parish Feast Days on January 2 each year, the repose of St. Seraphim. Vespers and Akathist on January 1 at 5 PM. The following day, January 2 (which is the anniversary of the Repose of St. Seraphim in 1833) we will greet Archbishop Benjamin and Bishop Daniel at 9:30 AM and begin the Divine Liturgy. There will be a festal meal to follow.
- **ANGELS UNAWARES:** Our guests arrive about 6 PM on Thursday, January 4. Volunteers are asked to come about 5 PM to assist with setting up the Hall for dinner. Any questions call Rachel (799-4117) or Michael Dovey (618-6585).
- **HOUSE BLESSINGS AFTER THEOPHANY:** The Feast of Theophany (Baptism of Jesus and blessing of water) is January 6. Please contact Fr. Lawrence between now and then to arrange a house blessing or choose a date and time from the Sign Up Sheet in the Narthex.
- **GOING AWAY PARTY:** Irimi and Brendan Schettig and family are moving to Greece. In order to send them off with our love and best wishes, all are invited to a going away party on Sunday, January 7 at 5 PM, in the Parish Hall. Food will be provided. Please bring beverages. Contact Matushka Xenia Schettig if you have any questions.
- **PIROSHKI SALES:** Prep work will take place from Wednesday, Jan. 17–Friday, Jan. 19, with final pinching/frying on Saturday, Jan. 20. Contact Bobbi Griovski for more info.
- **TALK BY FR. ANDREW CUNEO:** Our former associate pastor Fr Andrew will give a talk on January 17 on the book “Abolition of Man” by CS Lewis. Fr Andrew holds a PhD from Oxford where he specialized on the work of the famous English professor, novelist and religious writer CS Lewis. The talk will take place after the 6 PM Vespers. Please bring a lenten dish to share. Garrett Hamner will continue the discussion the following Wednesday after Vespers.
- **PARISH RETREAT: “PHILOTIMO as Sacramental to Marriage.”** The word “philotimo” has many meanings: to sacrifice, to understand and to act—with joy—for the good of the other person. A retreat on marriage wellness, in relation to the idea of “philotimo,” will be led by Father Timothy Pavlatos Saturday, January 27 at 9:30 AM. Fr. Timothy serves at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Portland, OR., and is a licensed marriage and family therapist. He is the Family Wellness Ministry Director for the SF Diocese of the Greek Orthodox Church. See the flyer for more information.
- **THE ANNUAL “WALK FOR LIFE”** in San Francisco is scheduled for Saturday, January 27, Noon, at the Civic Center. See Deacon Jeremiah if you would like to be part of a parish contingent to the Walk.
- **PILGRIMAGE:** I have re-scheduled a trip to Mount Athos in Northern Greece for January 29–Feb. 9. During my absence, pastoral emergencies can be handled by Fr John (707-318-1559) and Alexander Krassovsky from Sts. Peter and Paul (707-292-5101). Fr Peter Robicheau will come to help Fr. John for Church Services for the various Church Services.

CLING TO GOD

The faithful are often scandalized by the prosperity of sinners. And it is true that if we look at things from a purely human perspective it can seem as if God has distributed His blessings unjustly. Here, where He should have given a measure of happiness, He has given only misfortune. And there, where He should have dispensed riches, He gave only poverty. And where poverty was in order, he lavished wealth. When we wait for a blessing, He often deals us a hard blow, while at the same time He maintains smiles on the faces of those around us. In a way that echoes modern social concerns, we might say that God discriminates, and this is something that scandalizes us. Why does this scandalize us? The answer is simple. It is because our hearts are still attached to earthly things, still clinging to false “goods” that we continue to covet and crave. Thus the solution to our dilemma must be sought elsewhere, and this means that we should not be hasty in abolishing whatever strikes us as discrimination or injustice. We live in a time of rapid change, when every innovation is presented to us as “progress,” but before real change, real progress, can take place, something must first change within us. And for this to happen we must become completely estranged to all things earthly and human, to all human logic, to all human ways of thinking, and to every so-called material good. We must be indifferent in the face of all things. And only then, when we have become strangers to all, can God become all things to us, as if there existed nothing else in the world for us except God. It is this alone that can grant us true and lasting tranquility. Otherwise, if our heart is attached to anything earthly, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem to be, we can be sure that it will make us suffer. —*Elder Aemelianos of Athos*

PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

JANUARY 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Dec. 31 - New Year's Eve • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy <i>No Agape Meal</i> • 5 PM, Great Vespers for Circumcision of Christ	1 - St. Basil Day • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy and Prayers for New Year • 5 PM Great Vespers and Akathist	2 - Repose of St. Seraphim • 9:30 AM, Greeting of Hierarchs and Divine Liturgy • Festal Lunch	3 No Vespers	4 • 5 PM, Angels Unawares outreach • 5:30 PM, Panikhida for Barbara McMil. • 6 PM, Royal Hours	5 • 6:15 PM, Matins for Theophany of Christ	6 • 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy and Great Blessing of Water • 5 PM, Great Vespers
7 - Synaxis of St. John the Baptist • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy and Great Blessing of Water • Noon, Agape Meal	8	9	10 • 5 PM, Redwood Empire Food Bank • 6 PM, Vespers	11 • Noon, Senior Lunch Fellowship • 7 PM, Master Planning Mtg	12	13 • 5 PM, Great Vespers
14 - St. Nino of Georgia • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal	15	16	17 • 6 PM, Vespers • 6:30 PM, Potluck and Talk by Fr. Andrew Cuneo on "Abolition of Man" by CS Lewis	18 <i>[Fr L in SF all day at Diocesan Council Mtg.]</i> • 7 PM, Parish Council	19	20 • 4 PM, Children's Choir • 5 PM, Great Vespers
21 - Zachaeus Sunday • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal	22	23	24 • 6 PM, Vespers, Potluck and talk #2, by G. Hamner on "Abolition of Man"	25	26	27 • 9:30 AM, Retreat with Fr. Timothy Pavlatos • <i>Noon, Walk for Life / SF</i> • 5 PM, Great Vespers
28 - Publican and Pharisee • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal	29	30	31 • 6 PM, Reader Vespers	February 1 • 6:15 PM, Vigil for the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple	2 - Meeting of the Lord • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy and blessing of Candles	3 • 3:30 PM, Catechism <i>On Holy Baptism</i> • 4 PM, Children's Choir • 5 PM, Great Vespers

- HOUSE BLESSINGS: Please see the Sign Up Sheet in the Narthex
- PILGRIMAGE: Fr. Lawrence will be on a pilgrimage to Mount Athos from Jan. 29–Feb. 9.
- USHERS: Dec. 31—Michael Dovey; Jan. 7—Elsie and Martin; Jan. 14—John and Roz; Jan. 21—Shannon and Ted; Jan. 28—Alexandra and Preston