

Epiphany
Fr. George Timko
Upbeat
v.1, n. 11, 1969

Thou hast appeared to the world today, O Lord,
And Thy light has shone forth upon us.
With full knowledge we praise Thee
Thou has come and Thou art visible
O unapproachable Light.

--Kontakion

On January 6th, the Orthodox Church celebrates the Epiphany Festival. This Festival is usually known as the celebration of Christ's baptism. But this is only one part of the Feast. There is another and deeper meaning of the Epiphany Festival.

In the first place, the proper name of this Festival is "The Holy Theophany." "Theophany" means "the appearance of God." So the Feast of Epiphany is dedicated to the memory of Christ's baptism *and* to the memory of God's appearance to mankind. The Feast is often called Epiphany because Epiphany means an appearance.

It was at the Baptism of our Lord that God appeared in the form of the Trinity. Even though we constantly hear about the Trinity in Church, we do not very often understand exactly who this Trinity is, and what it means to us. The Trinity is clearly expressed in the Troparion (Hymn) of the Feast:

When Thou, O Lord, was baptized in the Jordan,
The Worship of the Trinity was made manifest.
For the voice of the Father bore witness to Thee,
And called Thee His beloved Son.
And the Spirit, in the form of a dove,
Confirmed the truthfulness of this Word.
O Christ our God, who revealed Thyself
And has illumined the world
Glory to Thee!

Here, at the Baptism of Christ, we see affirmed one of the greatest Christian truths—the truth that God is one essence and three persons. Here we see God revealing Himself as one triune being. We hear the Father speaking; we see the Holy Spirit descending; and the only-begotten Son being Baptized.

The Trinity is a great mystery. Our limited minds find it difficult to understand. Yet the Truth of the fact of the Trinity cannot be denied. The Trinity is a life of love and peace. In God there is a fellowship of three Persons, living together, united in nature, will, knowledge, understanding and action. This relationship is intimate and personal. It

consists of an ideal social life of harmony and friendship, of companionship and common purpose.

Thus God is the pattern for society. God wants men to live together as one as He lives together as three Persons. As They love one another, so are we to love one another—perfectly, completely, truthfully. We are asked to unite ourselves to Them and in Them, as They are united in each other (John 17). That is what Orthodox life means—seeking this unity with God, sharing God’s life. And of course, the weekly Liturgy tries to be the expression of that “coming together” and becoming one mind, one voice, one heart—becoming worthy, in other words, to receive God into our own bodily lives in the Eucharist, and of being received into God’s life in return. That is the answer to the question, “What do Orthodox believe?”

It shows, too, how Orthodox Christians look at matter and material things in a revolutionary new way. God used matter—flesh, bodies, oil, water, bread and wine, etc. for spiritual purposes. The Epiphany Festival emphasizes our new and radical approach to created things to the world in its use of water.