

EPIPHANY, THEOPHANY – THE SHOWING FORTH OF GOD!



Epiphany! Theophany! Two good Greek words expressing and proclaiming to the world the showing forth of God in His fullness. In the first centuries of Christianity, the feast of the Epiphany was regarded as a collective feast for it embraced other events in the life of Jesus which bore witness to His divinity – namely, His Nativity, the homage of the Wise Men from the East, the Baptism of the Lord in the river Jordan, the first miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee and the miraculous multiplication of the loaves. St. Augustine in his homily on the Feast of the Epiphany said: “Today we celebrate the mystery of the Epiphany on earth. Today God, by means of a star in the heavens, heralded His Nativity; and by baptism in the Jordan, He sanctified water for the renewal of humankind; at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, He changed water into wine; and with five loaves of bread, He fed five thousand people.”

In the Eastern Church (Ukrainian Catholic Church) the main emphasis of the feast is on the Baptism of the Lord in the river Jordan by John and the public manifestation of the incarnate Word to the world. Epiphany is the showing forth of God because it was there, at the Baptism of Jesus, that all three Persons of the Holy Trinity appeared for the first time. The Father’s voice testified from heaven that Jesus is the Son of God. The Son accepted His Father’s testimony, and the Holy Spirit was seen descending from the Father in the form of a dove and resting upon the Son.

“And when Jesus had been baptized, just as He came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to Him and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Him. And the voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with Whom I am well pleased.’” (Matthew 3: 16-17)

God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – plays an important role in the life and worship of every Christian. In the Eastern Church we make the sign of the cross with the thumb and first two fingers representing the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. An Eastern Catholic brings these three fingers together to signify that s/he believes not in the three Gods but in One. We are baptized in the name of the Trinity; every liturgy in the Eastern Church begins with the name of the Trinity; we are blessed in the name of the Trinity; we confess our faith in the Holy Trinity when we say in the Nicene Creed: “I believe in One God, the Father, the Almighty... I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ... I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life...”

The doctrine of the Trinity may seem incomprehensible and remote; yet it is one of the basic teachings of the Catholic Church. It is basic because it tells us so much about God, about how Christians have experienced His presence in the past and about how we may experience the fullness of His presence today. Saint Peter and the other apostles, for example, knew God in three ways. They knew God as “Father”. They knew God as: “Son” in the person of Jesus Christ. On Pentecost they experienced God as “Holy Spirit”, as a presence and power within their own hearts and within the Church.

The Trinity means that I believe in God the Father Who made me; God the Son Who saves me, God the Holy Spirit Who lives in me. God the Father: for us in love! God the Son: with us in grace! God the Holy Spirit: in us in power!

Resources: “A Byzantine Rite. Liturgical Year.” Julian J. Katrij, OSBM. Basilian Fathers Publication. Detroit, 1983.
<http://lit.royaldoors.net/2013/12/09/january-6-2014-the-holy-theophany-of-our-lord-god-and-saviour-jesus-christ/>

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

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