

9Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Sunday before Theophany

January 4, 2009

Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor;
Father John Cmur; Deacon Kenneth E. Ellis and
Subdeacon Daniel J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris,
Cantors

Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158

We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area. We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people. We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.

We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.

We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.

We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us 2 Corinthians 4: 5 – 8.

GLAD TIDINGS

+++ Today we have festal anointing on the occasion of this past week's feast of the Circumcision of the Lord as well as St. Basil's feast day. The customary greeting is "Christ Is Among Us!" to which we reply, "He Is And Shall Be!"

+++ This Tuesday is the solemn feast of the Baptism of our Lord. In anticipation, the vespereal Divine Liturgy and blessing of water will take place Monday evening at 7:30 PM. Please come and join us in celebration and praise as well as to receive the blessing of Christ's baptismal water.

+++ The sign-up sheet for both the Web Site and Bulletin sponsors is on the bulletin board in the kitchen. Please sign up as soon as possible. Do **NOT** make payment until your sign up month has arrived. This will make it easier for Father to keep track of payments. Thanks in advance to all who support the parish in this way.

+++ The weekly Scripture Study meets on Sundays following the Divine Liturgy while children attend their own classes. Everyone now has an opportunity to participate in adult religious education at which Scripture is discussed and explained along with other interests.

+++ We offer thanks to the Blessed Trinity for inspiring generosity in the souls of our faithful and the blessing of abundant grace in our midst with the offering received this past week-end: Tithe Offering, Candles, Food Coupons, \$██████████, Christian Fellowship, Candy Sales, \$██████████, Nativity of our Lord, \$██████████, for a total of \$██████████. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offered their God-given treasure for the sake of the Lord and the good of our parish. God bless and reward you good and faithful souls! The attendance was 38 adults and 14 children last Sunday.

+++ As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: No Name.

+++ We make a **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN** Canister available for our faithful to bring in pennies for our altar and its appointments. We are already in receipt of \$██████████ from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.

+++ For the expansion of our much needed parochial facilities, our parish pledge support to date totals \$██████████. As we thank the Lord for inspiring generosity in the hearts of our faithful, we also thank the donors for accepting the challenge of the Lord in building up His Body. We cordially invite and look forward to receiving additional and increased pledges from all our devoted parishioners.

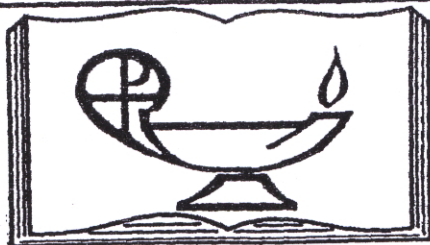
+++ Please check the Sign-Up-Sheet for the weekly Christian Fellowship for the coming weeks. Simple foods without need for preparation are the best. Marilyn Korba coordinates this vital apostolate. Please assist her in making it a success by bringing your donation early so that all are present at the worship of our God.

+++ Please be certain to see **Helen Karpiak** or a member of the Parish Council if you would like to help our parish by using **Shop Rite Food Coupons** available in \$20.00 denominations. We invite **ALL** to be caring and supportive and use Grocery Coupons for food shopping as we have gratefully realized \$██████████ on this project to date!

+++ As soon as possible, please see Marilyn Korba to sign up for the Alaskan Cruise next August, 2009. We are in need of your support.

+++ May all glory, adoration and worship be accorded our God in the Holy Trinity by all the faithful of our parish with one mind, one soul and one heart each day of the week!

LORD



TEACH
US

The Wisdom Of Our God

For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom and God's weakness is stronger than human strength 1 Corinthians 1: 25.

Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God forever and ever; for wisdom and might are his; and he changes the times and the seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to them and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; he knows what is in the darkness and the light dwells in him Daniel 2: 20 - 22.

It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens Jeremiah 10: 12.

Truly your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, an a revealer of mysteries Daniel 2: 47.

My son, if your receive my words and treasure my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord imparts wisdom from his mouth; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding Proverbs 2: 1 - 6.

To the only wise God through Jesus Christ, be glory forever Romans 16: 27.

Respect for the Lord is the foundation of true wisdom. The rewards of wisdom come to all who obey him Psalms 111: 10.

The Feast of Theophany ~ The Baptism of the Lord



The sixth of January is the feast of Theophany. Originally, it was the one Christian feast of the “shining forth” of God to the world in the human form of Jesus of Nazareth. It included the celebration of Christ’s birth, the adoration of the Wisemen, and all of the childhood events of Christ such as his circumcision and Meeting in the Temple as well as his Baptism by John the Forerunner and Baptist. There seems to be little doubt that this feast, like that of the Resurrection and Pentecost, was understood as the fulfillment of a previous Jewish festival, the Feast of Lights.

Theophany means shining forth or manifestation of God. The feast is often called, as it is in Orthodox service books, *Theophany*, where the emphasis in the present day celebration is on the appearance of Jesus as the human Messiah of Israel and the divine Son of God, One of the Holy Trinity equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Thus in the baptism by John in the Jordan, Jesus identifies himself with sinners as the “Lamb of God” who takes away the sin of the world” John 1: 19.; the “Beloved” Luke 3: 21; Mark 1: 35, of the Father whose messianic task is to redeem man from sin. And He is revealed as well as One of the Divine Trinity, testified to by the voice of the Father, and by the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. This is the central message of the heavenly manifestation glorified in the main hymns of the feast.

At your baptism in the Jordan, O Lord, the worship of the Trinity was revealed, for the Father’s voice bore witness to you, calling you his “Beloved Son,” and the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the truth of these words, O Christ God, who appeared and enlightened the world, glory to you!

You revealed yourself to the world today, and your light O Lord, has shined upon us, We recognize you and exclaim to you, "You have come and revealed yourself, O Inaccessible Light."

The services for this fest follow the exact format of the Nativity of our Lord feast day, although most certainly it is the Nativity that imitates the older historical feast of Theophany since it was celebrated much later. Once again the Royal Hours and the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil are celebrated with Vespers on the eve of the feast and Vigil is made up of the Great Compline and Matins. The prophecies of Theophany repeat the *God Is With us* hymnology from the Prophet Isaiah and stress the foretelling of the Messiah as well as the coming of his forerunner, John the Baptist.

The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Isaiah 40: 3 – 5; Luke 3: 4 – 6.

Once more special psalms are sung to begin antiphonal portion of the Divine Liturgy for the feast, and the baptismal hymn of St. Paul (Galatians 3: 27), replaces the song of the Trisagion. The gospel readings of all the services for the holy day recall the Lord's baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. The epistle reading of the Divine Liturgy tells of the consequences of the Lord's appearing which is the divine Theophany.

For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds. Titus 2: 11 – 14.

The main feature of this feast day is the Great Sanctification of Water. It is prescribed to follow both the Divine Liturgy of the Vigil of the feast and the Divine Liturgy of the day itself. Usually it is done just once in the parish church at the time when most people can be present. It begins with the singing of special hymns and the incensing of the water which has been placed in the center of the parish church. Surrounded by candles and flowers, this water stands for the beautiful pristine world of God's original creation and ultimate glorification by Christ in the

kingdom of God. Sometimes this service of blessing is done out of doors at a place where the water flows naturally.

The voice of the Lord cries over the waters, saying "Come all you, receive the the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of the fear of God, even Christ who is made manifest."

Today the nature of water is sanctified. Jordan is divided in two, and turns back the stream of its water, beholding the master being baptized.

As a man you came to that water, O Christ our King, and hastened O Good One, to receive the baptism of a servant at the hands of the Forerunner because of our sins, O Lord of mankind.

The following are three excerpts of the readings from the Prophecy of Isaiah concerning the messianic age:

Let the thirsty wilderness be glad, let the desert rejoice, let it blossom as a rose, let it blossom abundantly; let everything rejoice Isaiah 35: 1 – 10.

Go to that water, O you who thirst and as many as have no money, let them eat and drink without price both wine and fat Isaiah 55: 1 – 13.

With joy draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall you say: Confess to the Lord and call on his Name; declare his glorious deeds; his name is exalted Isaiah 12: 3 – 6.

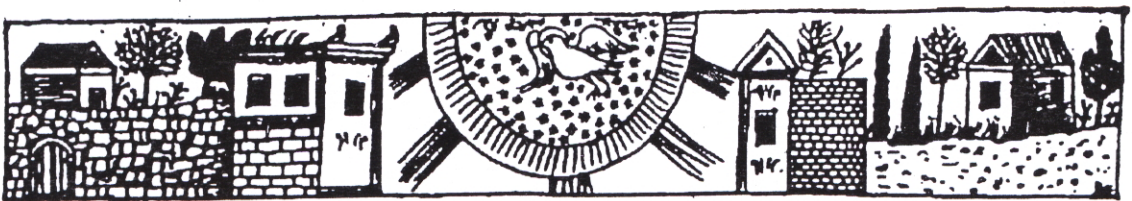
After the epistle reading (1 Corinthians 1: 10 – 14) and the gospel reading (Mark 1: 9 – 11), the special great litany is chanted invoking the grace of the Holy Spirit upon the water and on those who will partake of it. It ends with the great prayer of the cosmic glorification of God in which Christ is called upon to sanctify the water, and all man and all creation, by the manifestation of his saving and sanctifying divine presence in the indwelling of the Holy and Good and Life-creating Spirit. As the troparion of the feast is sung, the celebrant immerses the wooden Cross into the water three times and then proceeds to sprinkle the newly sanctified water in the four directions of the created world. He then blesses the people and their homes with sanctified water which stands for the salvation of all men and all creation which Christ has effected by his *theophany* in the flesh for the life of the world. Sometimes people think that the blessing of water and the practice of drinking it and sprinkling it over everyone and everything is a "paganism" which has falsely entered the life of the Church. We know, however, that this ritual was practiced by the People of God in the Old Testament, and that in the Christian

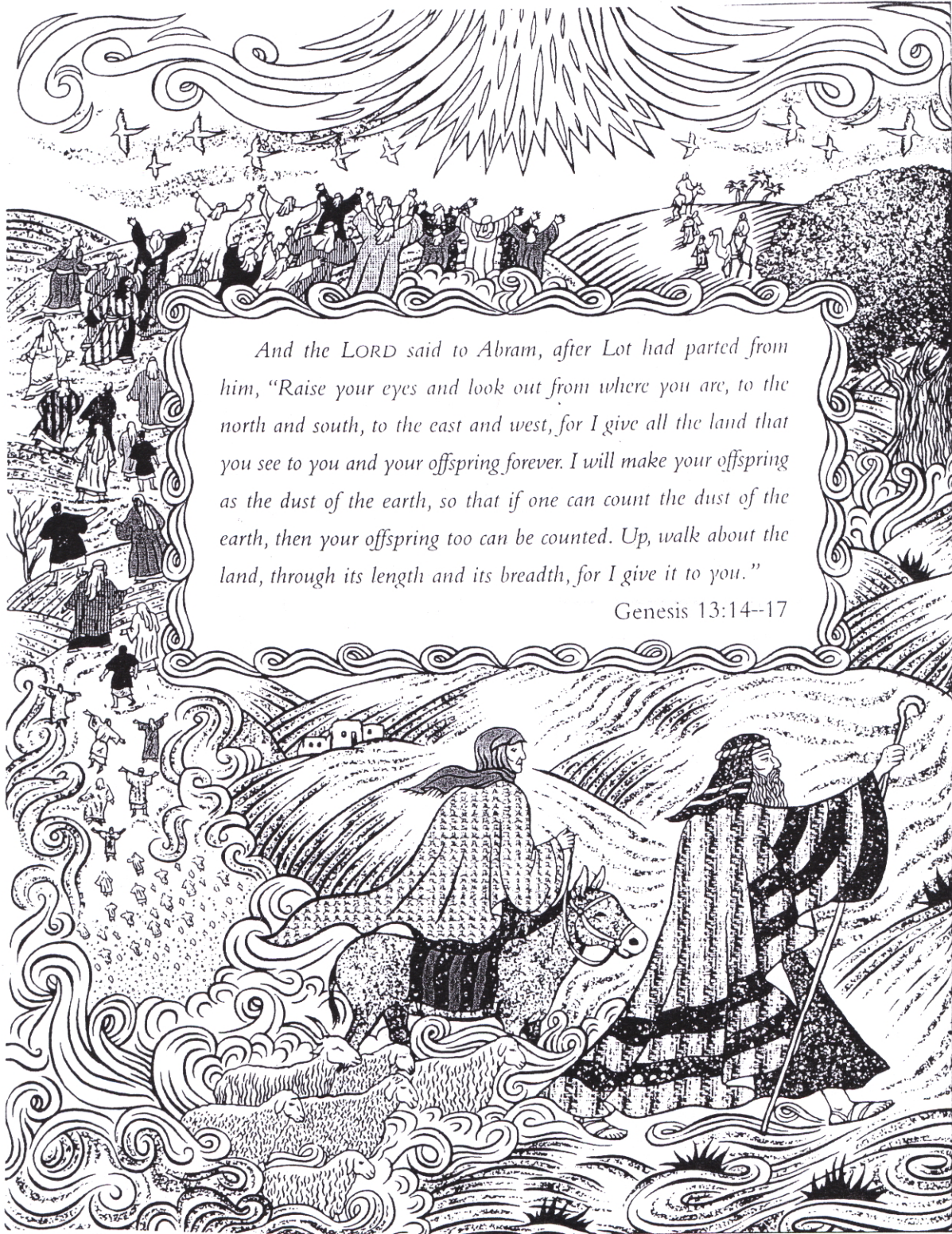
dispensation it has a very special and important significance because it purifies and reclaims fallen creation once again for the cause of Christ.

It is the fundamental faith of Christians that since the Son of God takes on human flesh and has been immersed into the streams of the Jordan, all matter is sanctified and made pure in him, purged of its death-dealing qualities inherited from the devil and the wickedness of man. In the Lord's Theophany all creation becomes purified and good once again, indeed "very good," the way that God himself made it and proclaimed it to be in the beginning when "the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the water" Genesis 1: 2 and when the "Breath of Life" Genesis 1: 30; 2: 7, was breathing in man and in everything that God made.

The world and everything in it is indeed "very good" Genesis 1: 31, and when it becomes polluted, corrupted and finally dead, God saves it once more by effecting the "new creation" in Christ, his divine Son and our Lord by the grace of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 6: 15). This is what is celebrated on Theophany, particularly in the Great Sanctification of Water. The consecration of water on this feast places the entire world, -through its prime element - of water the perspective of the cosmic creation, sanctification, and glorification of the kingdom of God in Christ and the Holy Spirit. It tells us that man and the world were indeed created and saved in order to be "filled with the fullness of God" Ephesians 3: 19, the "fullness of him who fills all in all" Ephesians 1: 22. It tells us that Christ, in whom "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily," is and shall be truly "all, and in all" Colossians 2: 9; 3: 11. It tells us as well that the "new heavens and the new earth" which God has promised through his prophets and apostles (Isaiah 66: 2; 2 Peter 3: 13; Revelation 21: 1) are truly "with us," already now in the mystery of Christ and his Body, the Church.

Thus, the sanctification and sprinkling of the water of Theophany in our parish church, on our individual homes and places of residence, even of business, is emphatically no pagan ritual, but a manifestation of living reality for believers who readily see, perceive and recognize it. It is the expression of the most central act of the Christian vision of man, his life and his world which is now renewed and sanctified once again in Christ. It is the liturgical testimony that the vocation and destiny of creation is to be "filled with all the fullness of God" Ephesians 3: 19.





And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had parted from him, "Raise your eyes and look out from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west, for I give all the land that you see to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, then your offspring too can be counted. Up, walk about the land, through its length and its breadth, for I give it to you."

Genesis 13:14-17

Did You Know That ...

...if you fool folks to get their money, it is fraud; if you fool them to get their votes, it is politics?

...you are making progress if every mistake you make is a new one?

...you should not be afraid to be vulnerable; if you will not open the door, how will anyone come in?

...every bad kid gets what is coming to him; he grows up to become a parent himself?

...the truly interesting man is the one who has genuine compassion for people?

...those born in America can never have the truly glorious experience of becoming an American?

...some days it seems as though the people were put in the world for no other reason than to aggravate us?

...laziness generally attacks every part of a person except his tongue?

...when a person grows up to like himself, he generally is more tolerant of others?

...a lot of mistakes would not have happened if folks knew as much as they thought they knew?

...taxes are a method used by our government to artificially induce the rainy day everyone is saving for?

...he is without humility who sees it in himself?

...you cannot pass into the arms of faith if you continue to stay in a spiritual rut?

...along with everything else, the facilities for getting into trouble have also improved?

...liquor is trouble put into liquid form?

...we must all learn to say kind words because no one resents them?

...the easiest thing to find is fault?

WISDOM! BE ATTENTIVE

When the Forerunner saw Him Who is our enlightenment, Who enlightens every man coming to be baptized, his heart rejoiced and his hand trembled. He pointed Him out to the people and said: "This is the Saviour of Israel Who delivered us from corruption!" O Christ, God, O sinless Lord, glory be to You! Vesper Hymn, Feast of Theophany.

O Saviour, the armies of angels trembled when they saw You baptized by Your servant, and the Holy Spirit bearing witness by coming down, and when they heard the Father's voice speaking from heaven: "This One upon Whom the Forerunner lays his hands is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased." O Christ God, Glory, to You! Vesper Hymn, Feast of Theophany.

When the Jordan River received You, O Fountainhead, the Consoler came down in the form of a dove. Behold the marvel: the One Who drew the curve of heaven bows His head to the Forerunner, to the one made of clay who cries out to His Master: "Why do You order me to do things beyond my worth? It is I who need to be baptized by You!" O Christ God, O sinless One, glory be to You! Vesper Hymn, Feast of Theophany.

O Lord, when John saw You coming to him at the Jordan River, he cried out: "How do You, O Lord, Who have no stain, come to me Your servant? In whose name shall I baptize You? In the name of the Father You possess in Yourself? In the name of the Son while You are the very Son in the flesh? In the name of the Holy Spirit Whom You grant to the faithful with the breath of Your mouth?" O God made manifest, have mercy on us! Vesper Hymn, Feast of Theophany.

The waters have seen You! O Lord, when the waters saw You, they trembled, for the very Cherubim do not dare to look upon Your glory, nor can the Seraphim rest their eyes upon You. They stand in fear before You, some on guard; others glorifying Your might. Together with them, we proclaim Your praise, O merciful One and say: O God become manifest for us, have mercy on us! Vesper Hymn, Feast of Theophany.

"I INDEED BAPTIZE YOU WITH WATER UNTO REPENTANCE . . ."

The Feast Day of Theophany marks an event of great spiritual significance. We celebrate Christ's coming to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. The voice of God the Father is heard at that sacred moment and the presence of the Holy Spirit is found in the form of a dove hovering over the head of the Son of God, thus making the Holy Trinity known to the world.

As Orthodox Christians we know that Baptism is a Sacrament that is viewed as a "rite of passage" given by Christ to the Church as an entrance into the Kingdom of God and eternal life. When we are baptized, we "put on Christ," uniting ourselves with Him so that we may walk in "newness of life." (Romans 6:4) Of course, this is not the baptism to which Christ submitted Himself when He came to the banks of the Jordan. For the Jews of His time, baptism was a form of repentance and an opportunity to be cleansed of the impurities of sin. Mark's Gospel tells us that "John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism for the remission of sins." (Mark 1:4)

Did Jesus need such purification? Certainly not! Christ was the Sinless One - the Son of the Living God. Is it any wonder that John the Baptist would protest, proclaiming with great humility: "I need to be baptized by You. Why are You coming to me?" (Matthew 3:14) But by making the purification of humanity His own, our Redeemer would wash away the sins of humanity. Thus, Christ's baptism was necessary to "fulfill all righteousness." (Matthew 3:15) St. Gregory of Nyssa puts it beautifully when he writes: "Jesus enters the sinful waters of the world and when He comes out, purifies the entire world with Him."

The Orthodox Weekly Bulletin Vestal, Cliffwood, New Jersey Litho in U.S.A.