

Festival of Lights

By Father Steven Ritter

Did you know that the Holy and Great Feast of Christmas was originally celebrated in tandem with the feast of Theophany on January 6? Most of the Orthodox Church, most likely starting in Constantinople, did this for about 100 years, though in Jerusalem the feast of Christmas was celebrated on January 6 *without* Theophany! The idea of Christmas on December 25 originated in Rome, and by the end of the fourth century was found everywhere in the east *except* Jerusalem, which did not adopt the current Nativity celebration until the late sixth century!

Both Christmas and Theophany were also instituted not from the idea of a commemoration of Christ's Nativity and Baptism, but as a defense of Orthodoxy. Gnosticism (which believed that the divine Christ never entered fully into carnal existence, but only temporarily into the man Jesus at the moment of

baptism) celebrated this on January 6 to contradict Orthodoxy. The church celebrated January 6 as the *epiphany* or *manifestation* of God in the flesh in Jesus Christ, both in his birth and baptism, and called it the *Festival of Lights*. Later when the Christmas celebration was

separated to December 25, it not only helped counter paganism in its winter solstice, but also the rising heresy of Arianism that denied the eternal divinity of Christ. This one-two punch asserted the orthodoxy of the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ, the babe in the manger as the creator of the universe.



In the services of the Church for the feast of Theophany, and in the theology reflected in those services, the Church wishes to dwell upon three different aspects of the baptism of our Lord. 1) His great condescension in accepting

baptism from a creature, and His divine insistence on "fulfilling all righteousness." 2) The first great visible manifestation of the Holy Trinity and the consequent testimony to the divinity of Christ. 3) The sanctification of the waters and of all mankind, a renewal of all creation by the power of the Spirit.

The troparion of the feast sums it all up:

When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan, worship of the Trinity wast made manifest; for the voice of the Father bore witness to Thee, calling Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit in the likeness of a dove confirmed the truth of His word. O Christ our God, Who hast appeared and enlightened the world, glory to Thee.

When we come to celebrate this incredible feast of life, remember the astonishing significance of the water before you; that it is not simply water, or even "blessed" water, but the very water that Christ Himself has been baptized into; the world has been renewed. These are the realities, and if we turn to the Lord, He will reveal this to us. May the blessings of this Great Feast of the Church be with all of you, and may its power shatter the imposters that try to supplant it. The new age of Christ has triumphed.

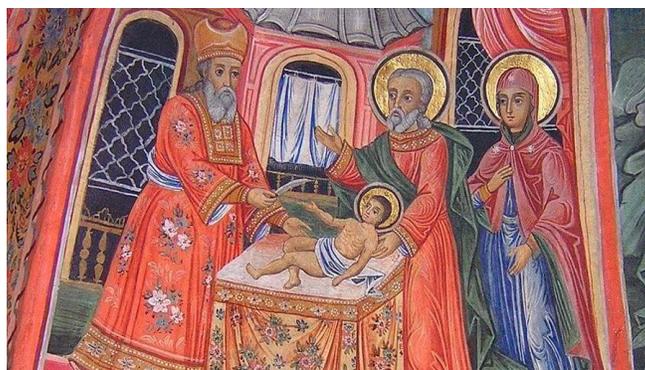
With love in Christ,

Fr. Steven



The Mysterious Feast of the Circumcision of Jesus Christ

This article was adapted from the Convent of St. Elizabeth in Minsk, Belarus



January 1st will mark eight days since Christmas. According to Saint Luke's Gospel, January 1st is the day when Jesus Christ was circumcised, following the law of Moses. What is the meaning of the Circumcision of Jesus, why is it so special and how do we celebrate it?

December and January: The Months of Many Feasts

In the Orthodox Church, December and January are two of the busiest months because it is all dedicated to Christ and the beginning of His earthly ministry.

December 25th: Nativity of Jesus

January 1st: The circumcision of Jesus

January 6th: we celebrate the Theophany (or Epiphany) – the day Jesus was baptized.

February 2nd: 40 days after Christmas, we commemorate the presentation of Jesus at the temple.



It is worth noticing that Christmas, Circumcision, and Presentation are three consecutive events that marked the beginning of Christ’s life and ministry on this earth, and we celebrate those feasts one after the other, just like it happened 2022 years ago. In a way, December, January and February are all about Jesus Christ in the Church’s liturgical calendar.

What is the Circumcision of Jesus?

According to the law of Moses:

“Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised.”

(Genesis 17:10–12)

As a Jewish baby, Jesus Christ had to be circumcised just like every 8-day-old boy. It is after the ritual of circumcision that the Priest was supposed to give the child a name. Christ was not an exception – he was named Jesus (which means *God is with us.*) As we might remember from the Gospel of St Luke, the Archangel Gabriel declared to the Mother of God:

“You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.”

(Luke 1:31)

Why do we celebrate this feast?

We live in the New Testament, which was established by Christ. This means that we do not need to follow the Old Testament laws and rituals. Jesus made the ultimate Sacrifice, so we do not practice sacrifice now, even though it was required before Christ was born. So what is the meaning of this feast and why do we celebrate it?

There are a few things that the feast of Circumcision teaches us. First, by following the law of Moses, God shows us that He obeys the law and *came to fulfill it, not to abolish it* (Matthew 5:17.)

Secondly, God shows to us that Jesus is in fact fully God and fully human, so He must be circumcised just like every other male human being. (Remember in the Old Testament that the male, as head of the lineage, was the one to signify this fulfillment of the law of Moses.)

Finally, we can see the ritual of Circumcision as the Old Testament way of being baptized. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant between God and His people and required a sacrifice of flesh. Now, Christians are born anew of water and Spirit. God's Sacrifice canceled the sacrifice of flesh, which is why we do not practice it anymore.

In general, the Lord's Circumcision reminds us that we have entered into a New Covenant with God. As it is stated in the New Testament:

“In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ.”

(Colossians 2:11)

How do we celebrate the feast of Circumcision?

In the Orthodox tradition, we celebrate this feast on January 1st, exactly 8 days after Christmas (when counting, we include January 1st as the first day, which is why it makes 8 days, not 7.)

On the day of the feast we celebrate a festive Divine Liturgy and sing special hymns. The first hymn is called a Troparion and it explains what happened on the day of Circumcision:

“Our human form hast Thou taken on Thyself without change, O greatly-compassionate Master, though

being God by nature; fulfilling the Law, Thou willingly receivest circumcision in the flesh, that Thou mightest end the shadow and roll away the veil of our sinful passions. Glory be to Thy goodness unto us. Glory be to Thy compassion. Glory, O Word, to Thine inexpressible condescension.”

(Troparion of the Circumcision)

The second hymn is called a Kontakion and it explains the meaning of the feast. It mentions the name of Saint Basil the Great because we commemorate this Church Father on the same day:

“Now the Lord of all that is doth undergo circumcision, in His goodness cutting off the sins and failings of mortals. He this day doth give salvation unto the whole world; and the hierarch and bright daystar of the Creator now rejoiceth in the highest, Basil the wise and divine initiate of Christ”

(Kontakion of the Circumcision)



As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

Matthew 3:16-17





Orthodox Faith in the Coldest Place on Earth

By Jessica Green

In the isolated part of the world known as the South Frigid Zone lies the continent of Antarctica. It is a place so remote that most of what we know about it comes from stories of explorers and adventurers. It is the coldest place on the planet earth with extreme temperatures, the coldest temperature recorded at Vostok Station was a bone-chilling: -128°F (-89°C .) It seems like a desolate place where no life can possibly survive. Yet, among the penguins, seals, and albatrosses anywhere between 1,100 to 4,500 souls live on the frozen continent year-round consisting mainly of scientific researchers and support staff.

There are currently eight churches that serve the spiritual needs of the population of the southern pole. The southernmost of these is Holy Trinity Orthodox Church. It is the Southernmost Eastern Orthodox Church on the planet earth and serves as the spiritual center of the 13 to 40 researchers and staff of the Russian Bellingshausen Research Station. Holy Trinity is located on King George Island, and was consecrated in 2004 by Patriarch Alexius II of Moscow. The building is roughly 50 feet in height and can accommodate 30 visitors.



Holy Trinity Orthodox Church located on King George Island

Holy Trinity Orthodox Church is staffed year-round by two hieromonks who not only fulfill the spiritual duties for the nearly 40 Russian researchers and staff, but also participate in the maintenance work of the Bellingshausen Research Station. Duties performed by the priest-monks also include daily prayers for the 64 Russian souls who have died during antarctic expeditions. The Church serves not only the Russian orthodox on the island, but also Chilean and Korean orthodox from other facilities.

Baptisms have been performed by the hieromonks in the frigid Southern Ocean and even one wedding which was performed on Jan 29, 2007 for a Chilean and Russian couple, Eduardo and Angelina, who worked together on the island.

Since Antarctica experiences a phenomenon known as “austral winter” January is the middle of the summer season in Antarctica and temperatures rise to a balmy 32 °F (0°C.)



May God grant them many many years!

In February of 2016 the Russian Patriarch Kirill of Moscow visited Holy Trinity Church and held Divine Liturgy services. After the liturgy Patriarch Kirill said: *“There are such places in the world where you need not say anything or explain anything. The place itself has a special spiritual energy...this spiritual energy was felt in a very special manner during the prayers.”*

During his trip Patriarch Kirill was followed by and interacted with some of the penguins of King George Island as scientists explained the behaviour of the flightless birds that inhabit the island.

During an address to the Bellingshausen Research Station staff the patriarch called the polar explorers the ideal representation of humanity, stating:



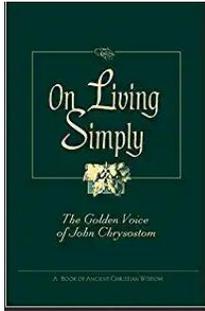
Russian Patriarch Kirill of Moscow interacts with a penguin.

“Antarctica is the only place where there are no weapons, no military actions, no scientific research directed at working out new means of killing people ... It is a kind of representation of the ideal humanity and evidence that people can live like this – without borders, without weapons, without hostile competitiveness, that they can cooperate and feel as members of one family.”

Life in the South Frigid Zone is extremely difficult and dangerous; and as a result the researchers and support staff work together to ensure the safety and survival of all despite any of the conflicts the governments of their parent countries have perpetuated. In this regard the Antarctic has become a microcosm of peaceful relations between all nations, an ideal of humanity living in harmony and with the love of Christ for all mankind.



Food for Thought



Now available to check-out from the St. James Orthodox Church Library: "[On Living Simply: The Golden Voice of John Chrysostom](#)" These excerpts from the sermons of Saint John Chrysostom bring fourth-century wisdom to 20th century

issues. Each serves as a brief introduction to a major spiritual thinker and as a meditation book for daily use. John Chrysostom was an important Early Church Father who served as archbishop of Constantinople.



[Ethiopian Yataklete Kilkil](#)

[Vegan, Dairy-Free]

Ingredients

- 2 large potatoes peeled and chopped
- 8 ounce green beans
- 1 cup carrots
- 1/2 medium onion sliced
- 1/4 cup or more canola oil
- 1/2 jalapeno deseeded and diced
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon grated ginger
- 1/2 teaspoons [curry powder](#)
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander spice
- 1 teaspoon [smoked paprika](#)
- 1/2 teaspoon white or black pepper
- 1 teaspoon salt (to taste)
- 1 8 ounce canned diced tomatoes
- 1/2 teaspoon chili pepper optional

Preparation

1. Add potatoes in a large saucepan, salt and add water just enough to cover potatoes, boil until tender for about 10 minutes
Remove and drain water
2. In a large saucepan or Dutch oven, heat oil over medium heat. Add onions, give it a minute or two then stir in all the spices; garlic, Jalapenos peppers, ginger, coriander, smoked paprika, [curry](#), white pepper, chili pepper. Simmer for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent burns. Then add tomatoes and bring to a boil, then simmer for another 5 minutes.
3. Then add potatoes, green beans and carrots. Season with salt.
4. Continue to simmer for about 10 minutes; stirring frequently, to allow the flavors to blend, if need be add water to prevent any burns. Serve Warm.



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publication in our newsletter please contact:

Jessica Green

St. James Orthodox Church

January 2022

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
2 Sunday before Epiphany 9:00 am 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	3 Forefeast of the Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ	4 Forefeast of the Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ 7:00 pm Catechetical and Adult Class	5 Eve of the Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ 10:00 am 5:00 pm Royal Hours of Theophany Vespers Divine Liturgy of Theophany	6 The Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ 10:00 am Divine Liturgy and Great Blessing of Water	7 Synaxis of John the Holy Glorious Prophet, Baptist, & Forerunner	8 George of Hozreva 5:00 pm Great vespers
9 Sunday before Epiphany 9:00 am 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	10 Afterfeast of the Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ	11 Afterfeast of the Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ 7:00 pm Catechetical and Adult Class	12 Forefeast of the Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ	13 Afterfeast of the Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ 10:30 am St. Maria of Paris Ladies Prayer Group	14 Leavetaking of the Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ	15 Paul of Thebes 5:00 pm Great vespers
16 12th Sunday of Luke 9:00 am 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	17 Anthony the Great	18 Athanasios and Cyril, Patriarchs of Alexandria 7:00 pm Catechetical and Adult Class	19 Marcellinus the Great of Egypt 6:00 pm Great Vespers	20 Righteous Euthymius the Great 10:30 am St. Maria of Paris Ladies Prayer Group	21 Maximus the Confessor	22 Timothy the Apostle of the 70 5:00 pm Great Vespers
23 14th Sunday of Luke 9:00 am 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	24 Xenia, Deaconess of Rome	25 Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople 7:00 pm Catechetical and Adult Class	26 Xenophon & his Companions DOMSE Clergy Retreat St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church, 2045 Ponce De Leon Ave NE, Atlanta, GA 30307	27 Removal of the Relics of John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople DOMSE Clergy Retreat St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church, 2045 Ponce De Leon Ave NE, Atlanta, GA 30307	28 Ephraim the Syrian DOMSE Winter Retreat	29 Removal of the Relics of Ignatius the God-bearer DOMSE Winter Retreat Great Vespers at St Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church, 2045 Ponce De Leon Ave NE, Atlanta, GA 30307
30 Synaxis of The Three Hierarchs: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, & John Chrysostom 9:00 am 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	31 Cyrus & John the Unmercenaries					