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Archbishop Elpidophoros of America: Homily on the Sunday Before the Theophany

Assumption Greek Orthodox Church

Windham, New York

January 3, 2021

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

Yesterday, we had a beautiful baptism in this Parish. Today, we journey together toward the Baptism and Holy Theophany of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Imagine for a moment that you were among those throngs of people who went out into the desert places to see – not Jesus, but His very own cousin, John the Baptist! Later, after John had been arrested, the Lord Jesus challenged these same crowds by asking them:

“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaking in the wind? Well, what did you go out to see? A man clothed in robes of silk? Behold! those who wear such delicacies dwell in palaces of kings! Well, what did you go out to see? A prophet? Oh yes, a prophet I tell you, and much more than a prophet!

More than a prophet. The greatest prophet. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Make straight the way of the Lord!”

The people poured out of Jerusalem and all the surrounding towns and villages to hear from this man named John – who lived on locusts and honey – and to be baptized by him as they repented for their sins.

Imagine for a moment that on this Sunday before Epiphany, three days before Theophany, that you are among those travelling to Jordan River. Perhaps you were caught up in the excitement surrounding this new Prophet. Or maybe you had a personal crisis, and you felt the need for cleansing and redemption. For those first century Jews, washing in water, or ablution, was part of their ritual tradition. Therefore, a practice such as baptism was not strange.

What was strange to them was the sight of John, shaggy in his tunic of camel hair and girt with a leather belt. His rugged appearance might have frightened some, and he preached the coming Kingdom with strong words. But they still came, and perhaps, you would have too.

So, now imagine you are traveling in the company of strangers, heading to the banks of the Jordan, and suddenly in your party is a young man, the same age as John. He has no remarkable appearance, as the Prophet Isaiah foretold. He has no need to confess even a single sin, for He has never committed one. And even though He is the rightful inheritor of the throne of King David himself, His clothes are simple and poor; no royal silks adorn Him. The truth is you would pay him no regard, no interest. Even when His cousin John hesitates to immerse Him in Jordan’s waters, begging Jesus to switch places and baptize the Baptizer!

Imagine, my beloved Christians, you who are the baptized and chosen of God, what you would have thought at that moment? When the heavens opened, and the Dove appeared, and the Voice of the Father sounded?

You see, my friends, the Lord journeyed from Galilee to the Jordan River not for Himself, but for us. He had no need of Baptism, but we do.

He had no need of forgiveness, but we do; He is the one Who implored our

forgiveness from the Cross.

He had no need to have the heavens open, but we do; He bowed down the Heavens to become incarnate in the womb of the Virgin.

He had no need to have the Holy Spirit alight upon Him, but we do. He is the One Who implored the Father to send to us “another Comforter.”

And He had no need of adoption by the Father, but we do. He is God of God and Light of Light, consubstantial with His Father and the Holy Spirit.

My beloved brothers and sisters,

Each of us who has received the grace of Baptism, has been given all of the above, because the Lord sanctified the waters: forgiveness of our sins, a place in Heaven, the Seal of the Holy Spirit, and the adoption by grace to be children of the Father.

Therefore, as we journey to the Jordan these next few days, let us be alert to the humble Nazarene, Who comes to the waters for our sake, and Who grants us eternal life, through His ineffable condescension. Amen.

Greek:

English:

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