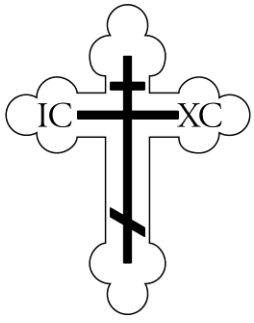


Protection of the Virgin Mary

Orthodox Church



Diocese of Chicago
and the Midwest
Orthodox Church
in America



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Merrillville, IN
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www.ptvm.com

Rev. Dr. Jacob Van Sickle
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Great Vespers: 6pm Saturdays

Divine Liturgy: 10am Sundays

Confession is available before or
after Vespers or by appointment

Welcome visitors!
Please join us in the
hall after Divine
Liturgy for coffee hour.

January 5, 2025

Eve of Theophany

The Feast of the Holy Theophany of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ is celebrated each year on January 6. The Feast commemorates the Baptism of Christ and the divine revelation of the Holy Trinity. At the Baptism of Christ, all three Persons of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—were made manifest. Thus, the name of the Feast is Epiphany, meaning manifestation, or Theophany, meaning manifestation of God.

The Biblical story of the Baptism of Christ is recorded in all four of the Gospels: Matthew 3, Mark 1:1-9, Luke 3:21-22, and John 1:31-34. John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus and the one chosen by God to proclaim His coming, was preaching in the wilderness and was baptizing all who would respond to his message calling for repen-

tance. As he did this, John was directing the people toward the one who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11).

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. Initially, John would not do this, saying that Jesus should baptize him. Jesus said to John, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness (3:15). John consented and baptized Jesus. When Jesus came up from the water, the heavens opened suddenly, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. The Bible records that the Spirit descended like a dove and alighted on him. When this happened, a voice came from heaven and said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." This was the voice of God the Father.

Christ's baptism in the Jordan was a "theophany," a manifestation of God to the world, because it was the beginning of our Lord's public ministry. It was also a "theophany" in that the world was granted a revelation of the Holy Trinity. All three Persons were made manifest together: the Father testified from on high to the divine Sonship of Jesus; the Son received His Father's testimony; and the Spirit was seen in the form of a dove, descending from the Father and resting upon the Son. The theme of "manifestation" or "revelation" is also expressed in Scripture with the symbolism of light. In the hymn of the Feast we sing, "Christ has appeared and enlightened the world." So, January 6 is also known as the Feast of Lights. The Church celebrates on this day the illumination of the world by the light of Christ.

The celebration of the Feast begins on January 5, the Forefeast of Theophany. Depending on the day of the week, this could be a Vespereal Liturgy of St Basil the Great or, if the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom was already served that morning, a simple Great Vespers. Following either service, the Great Blessing of Waters is conducted. On the day of the Feast, the Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom is served, followed by a second Blessing of the Waters. The Blessing of Waters is conducted in the church; however, in many places throughout the world services are conducted near open bodies of water.

The holy water from the church is given to the faithful to consume and to use in blessing their homes. In the weeks following the Feast, clergy visit the homes of parishioners and conduct a service of blessing using the holy water that was blessed on the Feast of Theophany.

HYMNS OF THE DAY

Tone 3 – Resurrectional Troparion

Let the heavens rejoice!

Let the earth be glad!

For the Lord has shown strength with His arm.

He has trampled down death by death.

He has become the first born of the dead.

He has delivered us from the depths of hell,

and has granted to the world//

great mercy.

Tone 4 – Troparion of the Eve of Theophany

The River Jordan was turned back by the mantle of Elisha,
after Elijah had been taken up to heaven.

The waters were parted in two,
and the stream became a dry path.

This was truly a type of baptism,
by which we pass over the stream of life.//

Christ has shone forth in the Jordan to sanctify the waters.

Tone 4 – Patronal Troparion

Today the faithful celebrate the feast with joy,
illuminated by your coming, O Mother of God.

Beholding your pure image we fervently cry to you:

Encompass us beneath the precious veil of your protection.

Deliver us from every form of evil

by entreating Christ, your Son and our God//

that He may save our souls.

Tone 3 – Resurrectional Kontakion

On this day You rose from the tomb, O Merciful One,
leading us from the gates of death.

On this day Adam exults as Eve rejoices
with the Prophets and Patriarchs.//

They unceasingly praise the divine majesty of Your power.

Tone 2 – Kontakion of the Eve of Theophany

O Christ, in Your compassion and infinite mercy,

You are coming as a man to be baptized in the Jordan,
in order to take away the many transgressions of us all,
clothing me in the garment of ancient glory//

of which I was cruelly stripped bare.

Tone 4 – Kontakion of the Forefeast of Theophany

Today the Lord enters the Jordan and cries out to John:

“Do not be afraid to baptize Me.//

For I have come to save Adam, the first-formed man.”

Tone 3 – Patronal Kontakion

Today the Virgin stands in the midst of the Church,

And with choirs of saints she invisibly prays to God for us.

Angels and bishops worship.

Apostles and prophets rejoice together,//

Since for our sake she prays to the eternal God.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Tone 6 – Prokeimenon for the Forefeast (Psalm 27)

O Lord, save Your people, / and bless Your inheritance!

Epistle: 2 Timothy 4.5-8 (Sunday before Theophany)

My son: Be watchful in all things; endure afflictions; do the work of an evangelist; fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Gospel: Mark 1.1-8 (Sunday before Theophany)

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.’”

John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, “There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

WE REMEMBER IN PRAYER

N.Dep. William Harbison

Peter Lazaroff ('42)

Faryn Valdez

Joseph Kvortok ('50)

Marie Snodgrass

John Kuchta ('57)

Ev.Mem. Simeon Kalenich ('14)

Afanasy Slepí ('58)

Health & Salv.

Janet

Nina

Monica

Priest Jan

Gerald

George

Charles

Archpr. Peter

Rebecca

Linda

Kimberly

Mat. Cynthia

Christopher

Kimberly

Abigail

Hierom. John

Brianna

Steven

Charles

Archpr. Jonathan

Logan

Jamie

Rosemary

Mat. Vera

Olga

Kyleigh

Nicholas

Pr. Patrick

Janie

Lauren

Natalie

Pr. Gregory

Sharon

Kyle

Jovan

Mat. Beverly

Tanya

Linda

Michael

Pro.dn. Nicholas

Renee

Denise

Daniel

Mat. Anne

Ashton

Sergei

Abram

Nun Theodora

Michael

John

Zoë

Brendan

Chris

Cindy

Brenda

Rollie

Nina

Ron

Sergei

Claudia

Carissa

Matthew

Connie

Mary Ann

Carol

John

Lisa

Raymond

Snezana

Erin

Mazzy

Edward

Ryan

Aaron

John

Charlotte

Nathan

Marcietta

Terry

Joseph

Kara

Galina

Erin

Janice

Karen

Maria

Everett

Klaudia

Alisa

Alla

Angie

Maja

Michael

Elizabeth

Irina

Raymond

Moses

Samuel

Elizabeth

Anne

Helena

Joseph

Vitaly

Desiree

James

Dwight

Maria

Robb

Elijah

Renee

Viktoría

Gerald

Lydia

Dominik

To add the name of a loved one recently departed or for the anniversary of their repose, or someone living and in particular need of prayer, please speak to Fr Jacob

Special Petition at the Augmented Litany:

We pray, O Lord our God, for all those who suffer from acts of war, especially the victims in Ukraine, Russia, Israel, and Palestine. We

pray for Your peace and Your mercy in the midst of the great suffering of Your people. Vouchsafe to accept the prayers of the Church, so that by Your goodness, peace may return to all peoples; O Lord, hearken and have mercy.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We will serve the **Vespers of Theophany with Great Blessing of Water** after coffee hour today.

There is **no Bible Study tomorrow**, because of the feast.

The funeral service for Bill Harbison is tomorrow at Moeller Funeral Home in Valparaiso at 1pm. Visitation starts at 11am. Interment at Angelcrest cemetery will follow immediately.

2024 contribution statements (for taxes) and 2025 stewardship envelopes are ready for pick-up in the Narthex. It is a great help to our volunteers who count and record your gifts if you use the numbered envelopes assigned to you.

The **Women's Book Club** is reading *Do not Judge* by Hieromonk Gregorios of Mount Athos. The book is available in our bookstore at a reduced price of \$5. Discussion is Thursday, January 23 at 6pm.

Mark your calendars:

Jan 6: **Divine Liturgy of Theophany w/Blessing of Water @ 10am**

Jan 7: **Guys' Night Out** at Maxim's in Merrillville @ 6pm

Jan 9: **Faith Enrichment @ 10am**

Jan 11: **Women's Group self-defense class** in the hall @ 11am
Catechism Class @ 4:30pm

Jan 14: **Men's Breakfast** at Bob Evans, Valparaiso @ 7:15am

Jan 17: **Red Cross Blood Drive, 12-6pm**

Jan 18: **Priestly Ordination of Protodeacon Nicholas** at Holy Trinity Cathedral in Chicago @ 9:30am

Jan 23: **Women's Book Club @ 6pm**

Jan 29: **Festal Vespers for the Feast of the Three Hierarchs @ 6pm**

Jan 30: **Divine Liturgy for the Feast of the Three Hierarchs @ 10am**

Last Week's Gifts to the Lord: \$8,092

A Theophany Sermon

by St Theophan the Recluse

Celebrating holy Theophany, we are transported in thought to the very place of this event, and we shall intelligently attend to what is happening there! There it is—Bethabara! You can see St. John standing on the shore, in clothes made of camel’s hair, with a girdle of a skin about his loins. He is surrounded by a countless multitude of people from Jerusalem, Judea, and all the lands around the Jordan. The Baptism of the Lord has just finished, and all eyes are fixed upon the Son of Man just emerged from the waters. They see nothing else. But sharpen by faith the eye of your mind, and following after John, passing over what is seen by all, turn an attentive gaze upon what is not seen by all—on the opened heavens, the dove descending, and the voice saying, *Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*. Fix your gaze, and do not tear your attention away from this wondrous vision! O! Who will give power to our words, that they might worthily sing praises to God in three hypostases, revealed at the Jordan!

Along with lost paradise, the heavens were shut closed by God’s righteous judgment. But as a strong gate cannot hold back a powerful surge of water, so did the fortress of righteous judgment finally melt from the fire of Divine love—and now the heavens are opened. Brethren, let us also open the forces of our nature, let us insatiably receive the revealed God, and delight in Him. Let us soak all our senses with Him, all our thoughts and desires.

We are sunk in darkness; but here is abundant light. We are immersed in dismal separation—from heaven and from ourselves—but here is an all-enlivening peace. We are exhausted by our powerlessness, but here is the inexhaustible source of all strength! And as after the darkness of night all creatures long for the light and strive with desire to receive the first rays of the rising sun, so do we turn the illuminated eye of our mind toward the Theophany, desiring to receive the comforting rays of the Divine economy of our salvation, redeemed by the merciful Word of God the Father—and delight in them.

As a creature constricted by the cold of winter greedily meets the spring, which looses the bonds of cold, and again finds harmonious vivification, so do we, vivified by the hope of salvation, with our hearts receive peace shining forth from the baptized Lord—and we

delight in Him! As during the summer heat the thirsting soil drinks in with a thousand lips the rain falling from the sky, so do we with every desire of our souls receive all the strength that is ready to pour upon us from the Spirit descending in the form of a dove—and we delight in it!

Why should we even invite ourselves to this? For, aren't we all led into the economy of salvation? Shouldn't we all therefore be enlightened, and conciliated, and enlivened? But O! When has it been so? Once the Lord, recalling John the Baptist, said reproachfully to the Jews, *He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.* Every year in our holy church the Lord brings also to us the light of His Theophany before John in the Jordan. Doesn't He say to us through this, "Here is the burning and shining light!" Make sure that that you be willing to rejoice only in his light while it is shining.

Be careful, brethren, for you walk in danger! Doesn't the deceptive call of the enemy of our salvation at times seductively strike our ears? False wisdom says: "Come to me, I have the light." But it does not have the light, only a phantom light, and those who listen to it call light darkness and darkness light.

The world says: "Come to me, and I will give you peace!" But it has no peace, only a phantom peace, and those who are lured by it and discover the lie only too late reproachfully condemn it saying, "Peace! Peace! And where is peace?" The prince of the world promises wide berth and life, and power and pleasure. But he has neither power, nor freedom, nor pleasure—only a phantom of these, and those who are seduced by them can only call themselves alive, free, and satisfied, while in fact they are wearied slaves, tormented by deprivation.

Hasten, brethren, to acquire the skill of discerning all of this in the light of the Theophany and do not be lured by what is only called light, and peace, and power but is not. Strive instead ever harder towards the One Who is the way, the truth, and the life, also righteousness, and illumination, and deliverance. Well, we have almost gotten to judgment and self-condemnation. What is there to be done? That is how the Lord wants it to be. He has ordered that the Church brightly celebrate His Theophany, and wills that each of us enter into the joy of the feast only through the judgment of conscience. Whoever has tasted the gifts that are the cause of the Church's present celebration will rejoice; but whoever has not tasted them—first taste them, and then you will rejoice. Amen.