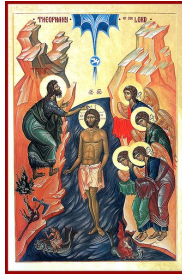


# Celebrating Our Faith

Byzantine Catholic Worship: *Our Church, Its Customs and Rich Heritage*

## The Theophany of Our Lord God and Saviour

**T**HE FEAST OF THE THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD places before our eyes one of the greatest and most profound truths of our holy faith — the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. At the baptism of Christ, the Most Holy Trinity was clearly revealed and bore witness to the divinity of Christ. In the Third Hour (Terce) of the Vigil of the feast we read: “The Trinity, our God, revealed Himself to us today as free from division; for the Father uttered the clear testimony to His Son, the Spirit descended from heaven in the likeness of a dove, and the Son bowed His pure head to the Forerunner, and being baptized, saved mankind from bondage, since He is the Lover of mankind.” In one of the sticheras in the Lytiya service of the feast we sing: “Seeing you, O Christ God, coming to him in the river Jordan, John said, ‘Why do You, Who are undefiled, come to a servant, O Lord? In whose name shall I baptize You? Of the Father? But You bear Him within You! Of the Son? But You are this Son made flesh! Of the Holy Spirit! But You know that through Your own mouth You give Him to the faithful! O Triune God, here revealed, have mercy on us.’”



St. John Chrysostom encourages us to have faith in the Most Holy Trinity: “Our faith — is the throne of the soul, the foundation of life, the immortal root. The life-giving root of faith is the Father; the unwithering branch is the Son; the immortal fruit is the Holy Spirit; that is the Trinity — simple, uncomplicated, unspeakable, incomprehensible, undivided in identity, in dignity, action, Divinity and grandeur; however, divided — in Persons and names, but One in essence and powers. The Trinity exists from eternity. Its existence had no beginning. It is without beginning; it is eternal, ageless, immortal, without end.”

Our holy Church begins Matins service with a sublime doxology in honour of the Most Holy Trinity: “Glory be to the holy, consubstantial (one is substance) Life-giving and Undivided Trinity, always, now and forever and ever.”

### Troparion from the Feast of the Theophany

*When You, O Lord were baptized in the Jordan, worship of the Trinity was revealed; the voice of the Father bore witness to You, naming You the beloved Son, and the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the word's certainty. Glory to You, O Christ God, Who appeared and enlightened the world.*

## Faith & Baptism: Necessary for Our Salvation

**W**HEN WE RESPOND to God's revelation by accepting it and adhering to it, we manifest our faith in the Creator. Faith is the assent of our mind and will to the free gift of God revealing or disclosing Himself to us. It is the virtue by which we firmly believe all that God was revealed, and entrust ourselves totally to Him. The First Vatican Council in its *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith*, chapter 3, on the question of faith and our total dependence in faith on God's revelation states:

*“Because man depends entirely on God as his creator and Lord and because created reason is wholly subordinate to uncreated Truth, we are obliged to render by faith a full submission of intellect and will to God when He makes a revelation. This faith, however, which is the beginning of human salvation, the Catholic Church asserts to be a supernatural virtue. By that faith, with the inspiration and help of God's grace, we believe that what He has revealed is true — not because its intrinsic truth is seen with the natural light of reason — but because the authority of God Who reveals it, of God Who can neither deceive nor be deceived.”*



Salvation is impossible without faith. No one can be saved unless he or she believes in God. That is what St. Paul teaches in referring to Abraham, the man of faith: “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3). Since Abraham believed (trusted in) God, he was justified; that is, he was granted the gift of being in right standing with God. The gift of justification is bestowed on the individual who truly believes in God and, hence, salvation is open to such a person.

The response that we are called to make in the present time is to have faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ demands Baptism by water in the name of the Three Divine Persons, and receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For Jesus Christ was quite emphatic that to enter the Kingdom of God, a person must be baptized (John 3:5). Baptism, therefore, is absolutely necessary for our salvation.

The Gospel of Mark records that Jesus spoke of the necessity not only of faith but of Baptism: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved (Mark 16:16). And after His Resurrection but before His Ascension into heaven, Jesus gave this command: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28: 19). Hence, faith and Baptism are necessary for our salvation, and for anyone to be a Catholic.

Baptism remits sins, justifies us, opens the way to entry into God's Kingdom, incorporates us into Christ and His Church. Through Baptism and Chrismation (Confirmation), we become members of Christ's Body, the Church. It imposes the obligation to belong to a local parish community or church within the universal Church. Whoever professes to be a Catholic but does not belong to a local parish church cannot claim to be a true Christian, nor a practicing Catholic.

## Christian New Year's Resolutions

**T**HE PRACTICE of making New Year's resolutions goes back over 3,000 years to the ancient Babylonians. There is just something about the start of a new year that gives us the feeling of a fresh start and a new beginning. In reality, there is no difference between December 31 and January 1. Nothing mystical occurs at midnight on December 31. The Bible does not speak for or against the concept of New Year's resolutions. However, if a Christian determines to make a New Year's resolution, what kind of resolution should he or she make?

Many Christians make New Year's resolutions to pray more, to read the Bible every day, and to attend church more regularly. These are fantastic goals. However, these New Year's resolutions fail just as often as the non-spiritual resolutions, because there is no power in a New Year's resolution. Resolving to start or stop doing a certain activity has no value unless you have the proper motivation for stopping or starting that activity. For example, why do you want to read the Bible every day? Is it to honour God and grow spiritually, or is it because you have just heard that it is a good thing to do? Why do you want to lose weight? Is it to honour God with your body, or is it for vanity, to honour yourself?

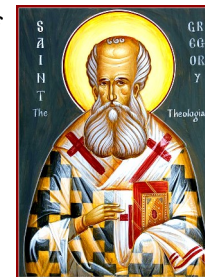
Philippians 4:13 tells us, "I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength." John 15:5 declares, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing." If God is the centre of your New Year's resolution, it has chance for success, depending on your commitment to it. If it is God's will for something to be fulfilled, He will enable you to fulfill it. If a resolution is not God honouring and/or is not in agreement in God's Word, we will not receive God's help in fulfilling the resolution.

So, what sort of New Year's resolution should a Christian make? Here are some suggestions: (1) pray to the Lord for wisdom (James 1:5) in regards to what resolutions, if any, He would have you make; (2) pray for wisdom as to how to fulfill the goals God gives you; (3) rely on God's strength to help you; (4) find an accountability partner who will help you and encourage you; (5) don't become discouraged with occasional failures; instead, allow them to motivate you further; (6) don't become proud or vain, but give God the glory. Psalm 37:5-6 says, "Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him and He will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun."



## Feast of St. Gregory the Theologian

**S**AINTE GREGORY the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople, a great Father and teacher of the Church, was born into a Christian family of eminent lineage in the year 329, at Arianzos (not far from the city of Cappadocian Nazianzos). His father, also named Gregory, was Bishop of Nazianzus. The son is the Saint Gregory Nazianzus encountered in Patristic theology. His pious mother, Saint Nonna, prayed to God for a son, vowing to dedicate him to the Lord. Her prayer was answered, and she named her child Gregory.



When the child learned to read, his mother presented him with the Holy Scripture. Saint Gregory received a complete and extensive education: after working at home with his uncle Saint Amphilochius, an experienced teacher of rhetoric, he then studied in the schools of Nazianzos, Caesarea in Cappadocia, and Alexandria. Then the saint decided to go to Athens to complete his education. On the way from Alexandria to Greece, a terrible storm raged for many days. Saint Gregory, who was just a catechumen at that time, feared that he would perish in the sea before being cleansed in the waters of Baptism. Saint Gregory lay in the ship's stern for twenty days, beseeching the merciful God for salvation. He vowed to dedicate himself to God, and was saved when he invoked the name of the Lord.

Saint Gregory spent six years in Athens studying rhetoric, poetry, geometry, and astronomy. Saint Basil, the future Archbishop of Caesarea, also studied in Athens with Saint Gregory. They were such close friends that they seemed to be one soul in two bodies.

Upon completing his education, Saint Gregory remained for a certain while at Athens as a teacher of rhetoric. He was also familiar with pagan philosophy and literature. His literary works (orations, letters, poems) show him as a worthy preacher of the truth of Christ. He had a literary gift, and the saint sought to offer his talent to God the Word: "I offer this gift to my God, I dedicate this gift to Him. Only this remains to me as my treasure. I gave up everything else at the command of the Spirit. I gave all that I had to obtain the pearl of great price. Only in words do I master it, as a servant of the Word. I would never intentionally wish to disdain this wealth. I esteem it, I set value by it, I am comforted by it more than others are comforted by all the treasures of the world. It is the companion of all my life, a good counselor and converser; a guide on the way to Heaven and a fervent co-ascetic." In order to preach the Word of God properly, the saint carefully prepared and revised his works.

In appearance, the saint was of medium height and somewhat pale. He had thick eyebrows, and a short beard. His contemporaries already called the archpastor a saint. The Eastern Church, honours him as a second Theologian and insightful writer on the Holy Trinity. His feastday is January 25, and he is honoured with St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom with a joint feastday, the Three Holy and Great Hierarchs, on January 30.