

Feast of Theophany

On the Feast of Theophany, we reflect on the humility of Christ not in contradiction to His divinity, but as its clearest expression. As St John Chrysostom explains, Christ comes to be baptized, not because He needs cleansing, but because His glory is revealed most fully through humility. If we accept the greatest mystery, that God chose to become man, then His willingness to submit to baptism should not surprise us. The One who was born of a Virgin, who will be beaten and crucified, resurrected and ascended for our sake, today enters the Jordan again for our sake.

This moment of humility is also a moment of revelation. St. Augustine teaches that at Christ's baptism, God reveals Himself clearly as Trinitarian. The Son stands in the water, the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove, and the Father's voice is heard from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son." Each Person of the Trinity is made known distinctly, leaving no room for confusion or doubt. At the Jordan, God makes Himself known not in mystery alone, but openly and visibly.

St. Gregory of Nyssa then draws our attention to why Christ was baptized in the first place. Though Christ existed before all creation, He enters the waters for our sake, to cleanse what was corrupted, to bring down the Holy Spirit, and to lift fallen humanity back toward heaven. Humanity was brought low through careful deception, but salvation is accomplished through God's even greater care and love. Christ's incarnation through the womb of the Virgin and His baptism mark the beginning of the restoration of mankind.

St. Gregory also explains that baptism is not a physical rebirth, but a spiritual one. We are not made young again in body, nor returned to our mother's womb. Instead, the soul is renewed. Just as a newborn child carries no guilt, the person who is baptized is freed from sin and restored to innocence. Through God's grace, the old life is left behind, and a new life begins. We may also experience this renewal through daily repentance.

May Christ, who sanctified the waters, cleanse and renew our souls through the love of the Father and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Sources

- A Sermon for the Day of the Lights, St. Gregory of Nyssa
- Homily XII on the Gospel of Matthew, St. John Chrysostom
- Sermon II on the Gospel of Matthew, St. Augustine of Hippo