

SUNDAY AFTER THE THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD,
GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST



Icon of Theophany — January 6th

St. Mary Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church

A Parish of the Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese (antiochian.org) ... and ...
The Diocese of Charleston, Oakland & The Mid-Atlantic (antiochian.org/east)
(“...the Disciples were called Christians first in Antioch!” Acts 11:26)



111 Alberta Avenue // Johnstown, PA 15905-3002

Website: stmaryaocc.org // E-Mail: stmaryaocc@outlook.com

Most Rev. Metropolitan SABA – Archbishop & Primate

Right Rev. Bishop THOMAS – Auxiliary Bishop

Very Rev. Fr. Donald E. Shadid, M.Div. & D.Min. – Archpriest & Pastor

Sub-Deacon Timothy (Cade) Scott, MAT

Edward Makdad, Jr. – Parish Council Chairperson

“The World is Evil... Weep for your Sins... Have a Piece of Chocolate!” (Advice from Staretz in Russia to Fr. T. Hopko+)

Fr. Don – Cell: 814-242-0084 – abeenad1@gmail.com – Office: 814-255-2148

SYNAXIS OF THE HOLY PROPHET, FORERUNNER & BAPTIST JOHN

Sunday, January 07, 2024

Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be to Him Forever!

New-Martyr ATHANASIOS of Attalia / Venerable BRANNOCK of Braunton

Happy New Year! God Grant Our St. Mary Parish Family “Many Years!”

We welcome all of you, our Faithful and our Visitors, to St. Mary Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church! It is a pleasure to have you with us as we glorify and praise the Name of our God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Please sing along with our Choir during the Liturgy.

Please note, as has been the practice of the Church since the Feast of Pentecost, that the Sacrament of Holy Communion can only be given to Orthodox Christians who have prepared themselves by prayer, fasting, regular Confession (at least twice per year ... 7 Yrs. old & up), who attend Liturgy regularly & on time (at least 3 times a month) ... and ... are at peace with all people.

When receiving Holy Communion, please fold your arms over your chest, open your mouth wide, tip your head back slightly, and allow the priest to place the elements in your mouth.

For our non-Orthodox brethren, we welcome you to sing and pray with us, venerate the Cross, and receive the Blessed Holy Bread at the end of the Divine Liturgy. Please join us again soon. May God Bless You Always!

HOLY OBLATION: Offered by The Faithful of our St. Mary Parish Family for the health & safety of all within Palestine, Israel, Ukraine & Russia; and in beloved memory of those who have perished in the conflicts which have enveloped these nations.

PASCHAL CANDLES: Offered in beloved memory of husband & grandfather, Ray & son, brother & uncle, Eddie, in remembrance of their Birthdays (Jan. 6 & 4), by Huda Martin & Family.

PROSKAMEDIA CANDLE: Offered for the health of Marissa (Ghantous) Votruba, as she celebrates her Birthday (Jan. 30), by parents, Albert & Mary Jo, and brother, Elias & his wife, Rebecca

SEVEN-BRANCHED CANDLE: Offered for the health of themselves (Jay, as he celebrates his Birthday [Jan. 4] & Feast/Name Day [Jan. 7] and Nitsa, as she celebrates her Feast/Name Day [Jan. 8]) and friends (Dn. Marek & all within the Simon Family and Bridget as they celebrate their Birthdays) by Jay & Nitsa McClatchey.

MEMORY ETERNAL! Today, we will remember the following from our Parish Family who have "Fallen-Asleep in the Lord" during the month of January, praying that they have been transferred from the "Church Militant" to the "Church Triumphant": Alex Abraham, Jacob Abraham, James Abraham, Margaret Abraham, Minnie (McLoota) Albert, Edward Audi, Frieda Audi, Rose Audi, William Audi, Sr., Fred Azar, Sadie Azar, Fr. Alex Curry, Betty Curry, Katherine Cury, Sala Delie, Matilda (Saleeba) Evans, Infant, William David Fennell, Amel George, Martha Gisewhite, Matushka Olga (Handziuk) Govrusik, William Hadad, Dawn Hagins Edward Hamaty, Anna Heider, George Heider, William E. Hockenberry, James J. Jaber, Josephine Jaber, Leslie Lynne Jackson, Julia (Audi) Mack, Genevieve Milkie, Elizabeth (Curry) Moore, Betty Jane Mulkey, May Petimezas, Khouryia Riketta (Nasser) Norman, Maria Plakakis, Adele Salem, Gimelly (Jemile) A. Salem, Joseph Salem Sr., Mary Shahade, Susan Shahade and Thelma Silek. Please pray for them and their Families. **May Their Memory Be Ever Eternal!**

TRISAGION PRAYERS OF MERCY (Naha): Offered in beloved memory of son, William David Fennell (+4 Yrs.) & grandfather (Jiddu), George Heider (+7 Yrs.) by Will & Lindsay (Heider) Fennell. **May Their Memory Be Ever Eternal ... Christ is Risen!**

<p style="text-align: center;">For The Living – "God Grant Them Many Years!"...and... For The Departed – "May Their Memory Be Ever Eternal!"</p>

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- VARIATIONS & NOTES ON THE LITURGY -

FIRST ANTIPHON: (*Refrain: "Through the intercessions of the Theotokos..."*)

"When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from among a barbarous people; Judah became His sanctuary; Israel His dominion." / *Refrain.* / "The sea beheld and fled: Jordan turned back. What aileth thee, O sea, that thou fleddest? And thou Jordan, that thou didst turn back?" / *Refrain.* / "Glory & Now" ... and ... *Refrain.*

SECOND ANTIPHON: (*Refrain: "Save us, O Son of God, Who wast baptized by John in the Jordan; who sing to Thee: Alleluia."*) "I am filled with love, for the Lord will hear the voice of my supplication. For He hath inclined His ear unto me, and in my days will I call upon Him." / *Refrain.* / "The pangs of death have encompassed me; the perils of hades have found me. Tribulation and sorrow have I found, and I called upon the name of the Lord." / *Refrain.* / "Merciful is the Lord, and righteous; and our God hath mercy." / "Glory & Now" ... and ... "O Only-Begotten Son and Word of God..."

THIRD ANTIPHON: (*Verses & Troparion During The Little Entrance – Tone Four*)

Verses: "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever. Let the house of Israel now confess that He is good; for His mercy endureth forever. Let the house of Aaron confess that He is good; for His mercy endureth forever. Let them now who fear the Lord confess that He is good; for His mercy endureth forever."

<i>Troparion:</i> See "Troparion of the Theophany of Christ" below.

AFTER THE LITTLE ENTRANCE:

TROPARION OF THE RESURRECTION: (*Tone Six*)

When Mary stood at Thy grave looking for Thy sacred body, angelic powers shone above Thy revered tomb; and the soldiers who were to keep guard became as dead men. Thou led Hades captive and wast not tempted thereby, Thou didst meet the Virgin and didst give life to the world; O Thou who art risen from the dead, O Lord glory to Thee.

TROPARION OF THE THEOPHANY OF CHRIST: (*Tone One*)

When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the River Jordan, the worship of the Trinity wast made manifest; for the voice of the Father bare witness unto Thee, naming Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the certainty of that word. O Christ our God, Who hath manifested Thyself and enlightened the world, glory to Thee.

TROPARION OF THE SYNAXIS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST: *(Tone Two)*

The memory of the righteous is celebrated with songs of praise, but the Lord's testimony is sufficient for thee, O Forerunner. Thou wast shown indeed to be the most honorable of the prophets, for in the waters thou didst baptize Him Who had been proclaimed. After suffering with joy in behalf of the truth, thou didst proclaim even to those in Hades the God Who appeared in the flesh, Who takest away the sin of the world, and granteth us the Great Mercy.

TROPARION OF THE DORMITION: *(Patron Feast Day - Tone One)*

In thy birth-giving, O Theotokos, thou didst keep and preserve virginity; and in thy falling-asleep thou hast not forsaken the world for thou wast translated into life, being the Mother of Life. Wherefore, by thine intercessions, deliver our souls from death.

KONTAKION OF THE THEOPHANY OF CHRIST: *(Tone Four)*

On this day Thou hast appeared unto the whole world, O Lord, and Thy light, O Sovereign Lord is signed on us who sing Thy praise and chant with knowledge: Thou hast now come, Thou hast appeared, O Thou Light unapproachable.

ANTI-TRISAGION HYMN (Sung instead of "Holy God, Holy Mighty,..."):

"As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Alleluia!" (3X)

"Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen."

"Have put on Christ. Alleluia."

Priest: "Dynamis!" ("With Strength!")

Choir: "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia!"

EPISTLE: Acts of The Apostles 19:1-8 *(Synaxis of John the Baptist)*

HOLY GOSPEL: John 1:29-34 *(Synaxis of John the Baptist)*

Concerning the "Kiss of Peace," prior to the Nicene Creed, we encourage you to greet those around you with a bow of the head and your hands across your chest, saying: "**Christ is in Our Midst!**"...the response being: **He is and Always Shall Be!**" In this way, we express: (1) our Joy that God has acted to restore our Communion with Him ... **and ...** (2) our Hope in the Resurrection from the Dead that is offered to us by our Lord's own "trampling down death by death!" **God is With Us ("Emmanuel")!**

MEGALYNARION OF THE SYNAXIS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST *(Instead of "It Is Truly Meet..." Tone Two):* *Magnify, O my soul, the Maiden who delivered us from the curse. O the wonder of thy super-intelligent birth-giving, thou all-pure bride, the blessed Mother through whom we have received perfect salvation, we invite a fitting song, offering as a gift the song of gratitude.*

KOINONIKON (*Communion Hymn ... Tone Eight*):

"In everlasting remembrance shall the righteous be; he shall not be afraid of evil tidings. Alleluia!"

INSTEAD OF "We Have Seen The True Light...":

See "Troparion Of The Theophany of our Lord Jesus Christ" Above.

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- THIS WEEK'S EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS -

(Church Office: Tuesday – Friday ... 9 AM – 2 PM)

+ Saturday, January 13 – GREAT VESPERS – 5 PM.

+ Sunday, January 14 – LEAVE-TAKING OF & SUNDAY AFTER THE THEOPHANY / EPIPHANY OF CHRIST ... MATINS (Morning Prayers) @ 8:30 AM & DIVINE LITURGY @ 9:30 AM ... Followed by Fellowship in the Social Hall.

May our Lord Bless all within our St. Mary Parish Family with a Healthy, Joyous & Peaceful (John 14:27) New Year!

... and ...

House Blessings Begin! ... NEW! NEW! NEW! ... If you would like your Home Blessed this year, please call the Church Office or email: stmaryaocc@outlook.com and ask to be put on the House Blessing List for 2024.

This is such a beautiful tradition of our Holy Orthodox Church in which our Spiritual Father visits our parishioners' homes and sanctifies them with the Holy Prayers of the Church and the "Holy Jordan Water!"

... Thank You! The Church Secretary, Anne, or Fr. Don, will then contact you to schedule a time for the Blessing of your Home!

"OLD CALENDAR" CELEBRATION OF THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD, GOD & SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST ... SUNDAY, JANUARY 07, 2024

We pray that all of our brothers & sisters-in-Christ who observe the "Old Calendar" cycle of Fasts & Feasts will enjoy a Most Blessed, Joyous & Peaceful (John 14:27) Feast of The Nativity ... we wish them a "Merry Christmas" and greet them with "Christ is Born! Glorify Him!"

+++ CONFESSIO SCHEDULE +++

By Appointment ... Please Call or Text Fr. Don @ 814-242-0084.

Due to Fr.'s Commitment to Matins, Confession Will Not Be Offered On Sun. Mornings.

THOSE IN SPECIAL NEED OF OUR PRAYERS: UPMC MERCY INPATIENT REHABILITATION FACILITY – Pittsburgh: Anna Marie (Abraham) Rovansek (#6024); AMBER HILLS @ CAMBRIA CARE CENTER (Ebensburg, PA): Mary Ann Unis-Asfar (#606); LAURELVIEW VILLAGE: George Zdravecky (Health Care #302) & Rhoda (Nasser) Zdravecky (Vista – 913); LAURELWOOD CARE CENTER: Suzanne George (#37-W) & George Haidar (#49); LUTHERAN HOME (Johnstown): Elaine Heider (#34); WESTMONT WOODS – QUALITY LIFE SERVICES (Westmont): Emma (Nasser) Audey (#115-W) ... **and** ... IN TREATMENT, RECOVERING AND / OR “SHUT-IN AT HOME”: Becky Azar; Larry Bertino; Carolyn Clark; Renee D’Ettorre; Patty Devich; Joanne George; John & Dalal George; Olga Hodge; Denise Khorey-Harriman; Matthew Makdad; Huda Martin and Sara Shahade. **May God Be With All of Them & All of Those Who Are Ill and/or in Need!**

MONTHLY CANDLES: The 2024 Monthly Candle Prayer Sheets are in The Brochure Rack outside of Fr. Don’s Office window in the Hallway. There are 3 Monthly Candles here at our St. Mary Parish: **(1) Paschal Candles (2 large decorated Candles on each side of Holy Doors); (2) Proskamedia Candle (burns on the Altar near the Tabernacle 24/7) & (3) Seven-Branched Candle (on top of Tabernacle) ... requested Donation ... \$20 per Candle per Month.** Please note that there can be more than 1 sponsor per candle per month. Also, unless a candle is sponsored for more than 1 month, sponsorship expires at the end of the month, no matter when it starts in that month. **Thank You & God Bless!**

HOLY OBLATION & AGAPE (FELLOWSHIP) SPONSORS NEEDED FOR 2024!

The prayerful work of offering the Holy Bread for our Divine Liturgy, and the Refreshments for our “Fellowship Hour / Time of Agape (Love)” are sacred opportunities for us to participate in the Liturgical Prayer of the Church and we should all participate when we are able. In the Holy Oblation, we bring forth our simple gifts of bread, wine & water to God, with our prayers that He will return them to us as the Body & Blood of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ! The Agape (Love) Refreshments are our offering of sustenance & sharing of God’s Gifts of Food & Drink as we break our Fast together in Christian Love. Each & every Sunday is a “little Pascha” for us, thus, as we do on Pascha, we are called to break bread together in Christian Love ... the Meal of Agape!

Unfortunately, we are having difficulty obtaining Sponsors for the Holy Bread and for the Agape Fellowship after the Divine Liturgy. It is our Orthodox tradition that each parishioner, as a member of our St. Mary Parish Family, participates in these ministries.

When we pass the Sign-Up Sheet around in the Sanctuary, or at any time, you may sign up for this wonderful ministry/opportunity. The Sign-Up Sheets are on clipboards which are located outside of the Priest's Office on the Pamphlet Table.

Thank you for your cooperation ... God Bless!

101 THINGS GOD CAN'T DO

What You Must Know to Win ... by Maisie Sparks (12/31)

25. God can't swear by anyone but Himself, and He swore that He would bless you.

"For when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee." (HEBREWS 6:13-14)

*** ATTENTION * ATTENTION * ATTENTION ***

Parishioner Envelopes & Calendars – 2024: Please stop in the Social Hall for refreshments and/or to pick up your 2024 Parishioner Envelopes & Calendar. You will notice two changes in the Envelope Booklets for 2024: **(1)** there is a slight change in the design of the envelope ... they can now be mailed to Church via the USPS ... e.g. if you have to miss Church, if you would rather not carry them with you, etc. ... **and** ... **(2)** we have increased the amount requested for your stewardship to the Archdiocese to \$75.00 per baptized soul in your family who belongs to our St. Mary Parish ... it has been many years since we have increased it and we do tithe (10% of our parish's income) as our parish's offering to the ministry of the Archdiocese as a whole.

Please remember that our Lord teaches us in the Holy Bible that all we have is not ours, but God's and we are stewards of that which he has blessed us with. Thus, He asks for us to offer the "first fruits of our gifts" (Exodus 23:16, Leviticus 23:10, Proverbs 3:9) and to tithe from our treasury (10% of our income – Malachi 3:7-12). When we give of our first fruits it reminds us that God is our ultimate priority. It manifests our obedience to God and that we can be trusted with more. Perhaps most important of all, when we are generous in this way we express our gratitude for all God has given to us.

+ How to Prepare for the Holy Eucharist +

To all those who partake of the Body & Blood of Christ when they participate in the Divine Liturgy:

As Orthodox Christians, we are called to the Chalice each and every time that we celebrate the Divine Liturgy; however, it is most essential that we prepare ourselves to receive the Lord so that we will not approach unworthily and risk experiencing the "consuming," rather than the "purifying," holy fire of the Eucharist.

With this in mind, the following guidelines will help us in our preparation:

+++ No excessive partying or socializing on Saturday evening ... we should keep ourselves in a quiet & prayerful atmosphere, reading the gospels and epistles of the New Testament and praying the "Prayers of Preparation" before Communion (these latter prayers can also be done on Sunday Morning if there is time);

+++ Maintain a prayerful atmosphere on Sunday morning ... (difficult with children, yes, but not impossible ... try it!);

+++ No consumption of food or drink past a reasonable bedtime the night before (preferably no later than Midnight) ... this includes no coffee, no smoking, and no chewing gum on Sunday morning as well;

+++ If you need your medicine in the morning, please take it ... if you are supposed to eat or drink something with it, then do so as moderately as possible;

+++ As always, we should partake of the Sacrament of Confession at least 2 - 4 times a year if we are taking Communion frequently (hint: use the 4 fasting periods of the liturgical year...Advent, Great Lent, Apostles' Fast & Dormition Fast) ... if we are not frequent communicants (3-4 times per month), then Confession before Communion is necessary each time we partake;

+++ At the very least, attend the Sunday cycle of prayer ... Saturday Evening Vespers, Sunday Morning Matins (Morning Prayers), and Sunday Divine Liturgy ... if we attend Sunday Liturgy irregularly (e.g. – missing more than once a month), then we should not be taking Communion each time we attend unless we have had Confession in the recent days prior (some exceptions – e.g. work or vacation);

+++ Be on time to the Divine Services and be at Peace with all people ... if we arrive at Church after the Little Entrance with the Gospel, we should not receive Communion on that day ... it is truly a sign of disrespect when we enter the services late and/or when we leave the Liturgy early (before the Dismissal) ... and ... our Lord tells us that we cannot love God and hate our brother ... for whoever is "angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment;" (Matthew 5:22) ... and ...

+++ Agape Fellowship Hour is not to be started until after the Divine Liturgy is completed!

Please strive to practice these Spiritual Disciplines and at the very least, observe the guidelines above concerning Fasting, Confession & regular Divine Liturgy Attendance.

Epistle

The righteous shall rejoice in the Lord. O God, hear my prayer.

The Reading from the Acts of the Apostles. (19:1-8)

In those days, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the One Who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them in all. And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the Kingdom of God.

Gospel

The reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. John. (1:29-34)

At that time, John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of Whom I said, 'After me comes a man Who ranks before me, for He was before me.' I myself did not know Him; but for this I came baptizing with water, that He might be revealed to Israel." And John bore witness, "I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on Him. I myself did not know Him; but He Who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on Whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."



May God Be With You!

Saint of the Day – January 7, 2024

SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

Because John's main role in his life was played out on the day of the Theophany (Epiphany), the Church has from earliest times dedicated the day following Theophany to his memory. An incident with the hand of the Forerunner is also linked to this feast. The Evangelist Luke desired to remove the body of John from Sebaste, where the great prophet was beheaded by Herod, to Antioch, his place of birth. He succeeded, though, in acquiring and translating only one hand, which was preserved in Antioch until the tenth century. After this it was transferred to Constantinople, where it disappeared during the time of the Turks.

Feasts of St. John are celebrated several times throughout the year, but this day, January 7, has the most *Svečara*.*) Among the Gospel personalities who surround the Savior, John the Baptist occupies a totally unique place by the manner of his entry into the world, and by the manner of his life in this world; by his role in baptizing people for repentance; by his baptizing the Messiah; and, finally, by his tragic departure from this life. He was of such moral purity that, in truth, he could be called an angel--as Holy Scripture calls him--rather than a mortal man. St. John especially differs from all other prophets in that he had that privilege of being able, with his hand, to show the world Him about Whom he prophesied.

It is said that every year on the feast of the saint, the bishop brought the hand of St. John before the people. Sometimes the hand appeared open and other times the hand appeared clenched. In the first case it signified a fruitful and bountiful year, and in the second case it meant a year of unfruitfulness and famine.

THE HOLY MARTYR ATHANASIUS

This martyr of Christ was a man simple and poor, but rich in faith and wise through the Spirit of God. Once, Athanasius unintentionally entered into a debate about the Faith with a certain Turk. The Turk was educated and adroit with words, but Athanasius endeavored with all his strength to emphasize and establish the truth of the Christian Faith and its superiority over Islam. After that they departed. The next day Athanasius was summoned before the judge. This Turk stood there as his accuser. When the judge called upon Athanasius to deny the Faith of Christ, as he had supposedly done before his companion the previous day, and to embrace Islam, Athanasius cried out: "I would rather die a thousand deaths than renounce the Faith of Christ." For this, he was condemned to death and beheaded in the year 1700 A.D., in Smyrna. His body was buried in the Church of St. Parasceva in the same city.

To God be the Glory and Praise Always!

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+++ **ST. MARY PARISH PRAYER CARD PROGRAM** +++

Did you know that we have a "Prayer Card Program" here at our St. Mary Parish. Your Prayer Intentions will be offered during the Saturday Vespers & Sunday Divine Liturgy "for the health of" or "in memory of" a Loved One and a beautiful Icon Card will be sent to the person or Family. All you need to do is to call the Church Office or fill out an "Order Form" (on Table below Brochure Rack outside of Offices). Then we will take care of the rest! IT IS THAT SIMPLE!

The suggested donation is \$10/card. Larger donations are greatly appreciated.

This is an excellent way to show a loved one that you are: (1) thinking of them and remembering them in prayer on their birthday, during holidays or any special occasion ... OR ... (2) remembering their departed loved one(s) in prayer. **Any questions, please call our Secretary, Anne ... 814-255-2148. Thank You & God Bless!**

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Let Us Venerate Today the Baptism of Christ ... Wash Yourselves and Be Clean

I cannot restrain my joy; my heart is deeply moved and filled with delight. Forgetting my weakness, I long to undertake the mission of the great John the Baptist; though I am not the Forerunner, I have indeed come from the desert!

Christ receives the sacrament of enlightenment, or rather He enlightens us with His brilliance. He is baptized; let us go down into the water with Him so that we may also come up with Him. John is baptizing, and Jesus comes to him. Christ certainly sanctifies the man who now baptizes Him, but His purpose is chiefly to bury the old Adam in the waters and, above all, to sanctify the waters of the Jordan by His baptism in them so that just as He was spirit and flesh, those who would later be baptized might be sanctified by the power of the Spirit and by water.

John refuses; Jesus insists. "It is you that should be baptizing me!" says John. The torch addresses the Sun, the voice speaks to the Word. Jesus comes out of the water, drawing the world with Him, as it were, and raising it up when it had hitherto been sunk in the abyss. He sees the heavens not being rent, but opening of their own accord.

The first Adam had of old closed heaven to himself and us, just as he had seen the earthly paradise being closed to him, with a fiery sword barring access. The Holy Spirit bears witness. Here all is in perfect harmony, for the testimony comes from heaven, just as He to whom the Spirit bears witness has come from heaven.

St. Gregory the Theologian