

Pastoral Reflection, Jan 2024: Divine Hospitality and Compassion: One of my favorite hymns for the Feast of Christ's Nativity is: "Ye mountains and ye hills, ye plains and valleys, ye peoples, tribes, and nations, and all things that have breath, shout with jubilation, be filled with divine gladness; for the Redemption of all is come, the timeless Word of God made subject to time because of His compassion." In the early Church, the Nativity and the Theophany/Baptism of Christ were celebrated together on January 6. So we can sing this same hymn for Theophany and Baptism of Christ. Made visible to a few persons at his nativity, His first general public manifestation as Christ is at his baptism. We are made very aware of His divinity and His humanity at His Baptism since this is the first recorded theophany of God as the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This theophany makes clear that the compassion of the incarnate Son of God for us expresses the compassion of the Father and the Holy Spirit, which is why we call our icon of the Trinity the Hospitality of Abraham after Rublev's famous icon.

We experience this hospitality at every eucharist in the Anaphora Prayer. Christ is our high priest — "the one who offers, and is offered, the one who receives and is received"; and the Anaphora prayer is offered to the Father who blesses us through the Holy Spirit to guides us to experience the mystery of the eucharist and to change the gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

The eucharistic gifts are offered within the Church and our ability to receive them first requires our baptism. As we pray during the service of the Great Blessing of the Water "For you, O Master, for the sake of your compassion could not endure to behold the race of man tormented by the devil; but you came and saved us... You sanctified the streams of the Jordan..., crushing the heads of the dragons that lurked therein." Our Baptism is the mystery, or sacrament, of the Church in which we are welcomed into the Church to begin our own journey into the kingdom of heaven. Although Christ is sinless, in his humility, he made himself the bearer of all of our sins through His baptism so that we could all be saved.

During our Liturgy this year, I added an icon of Christ the Good Samaritan next to the icon of the Theophany and Baptism of Christ because it shows Christ bearing us in our sinfulness and brokenness. As Blessed Theophylact described Christ as the Good Samaritan: "Our Lord and God . . . journeyed to us. . . . He did not just catch a glimpse of us as He happened to pass by. He actually came to us and lived together with us and spoke to us. Therefore, He at once bound up our wounds." As we celebrate this Feast in the context of our personal and collective brokenness, sinfulness, and weakness, please be aware that in His solidarity with us, He together with His Father and Holy Spirit bear us and bear with us in our sinfulness to bring us into the fullness of life, which we call deification, as well as the redemption of all creation. May the wonder and joy we are invited to experience at His Nativity extend to the Feast of the Theophany and His Baptism and throughout our entire lives.

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