

**The Great Feast of Holy Theophany**  
**Pastoral Sermon**  
**By V. Rev. Timothy Baclig**  
**January 5-6, 2019**

Time is a very fleeting thing. We have a sense of this each time we reach a new calendar year. Actually the morning of any new day is no different from any other. The sun rises in the East and sets in the West. It might be a cloudy day, a sunny day, a cold day or a warm day; but it is still just another day in time.

With God, everything is an instantaneous NOW! It is not much different from how you and I only live in the present hour of each day. For you and me there is only now. As part of God's created order we are framed in time and space. What is past remains unchanged. There is only the future and what we choose to do with it. For people who don't think of God and would disregard any thought of the existence of God, life with all of its sadness, struggles and difficulties is something you just make the best of. For some, life is a "gamble." But for the Christian, life is a gift of God that involves making choices, seeking to do the will of God, and acting responsibly. It is what St. Paul describes as being mature; understanding that Christ came to save us from sin and to renew us in Holy Baptism.

The Christian life is becoming God's partner as His sons and daughters who strive to do His will, but with spiritual power by the indwelling of His Spirit. "Tapping into" that spiritual power is not without repentance. And repentance is a life-long practice. It is mentioned in today's Gospel as the work that John the Baptist did up until the time that the Lord appeared.

A person could read today's Gospel and be completely misguided in their own understanding. First, it is very important that we understand that there is only one baptism, the baptism that you and I experienced whether as a child or as an adult: It is the baptism of regeneration when we are united to Christ and with the Sacrament of Holy Chrism filled with the Holy Spirit. and is tied to the receiving of His Body and Blood.

**Holy Theophany (or Epiphany) is a time of recommitting ourselves to Christ. It is a time of personal renewal. As men and women who were created in the image and likeness of God, Holy Baptism renews that image, and each year, with this Feast we revisit what it means to be made new, to be purified, sanctified.**

Try to think of it in this way: From time to time all of us who have credit cards have a new one sent to us that requires us to phone the “1-800” number to have it authorized. The Sacramental life of the church is our means of renewal. It begins at the Sacrament of Confession with the Prayer of Absolution.

It is not just the time to *get* a blessing. We need to ask ourselves: What do we want a blessing for? To do our own thing? We need to also ask: Why do we seek God’s blessing? To get what we want?

Everything about our life needs renewing, whether it is our minds, our bodies or our souls. The entire created world since Adam and Eve has been in a fallen state. The baptismal waters of the Jordan are called the “waters of regeneration.” It renews *all* of creation. And just as Adam & Eve were expected to be good stewards of all of creation, we too are expected to do the same by God’s renewing grace. It is the way of salvation established by God, who by sending His Son into the world provided for us the means of being made new. By His coming into the world, and through his atoning death on the Cross, burial and resurrection, Christ re-establishes and restores us to our first freedom and God’s created purpose. All of this is now known and made real to us by our participation in the Sacramental life of the Church:

**In other words, the Sacramental life of the Church, namely: Holy Baptism, Chrismation, Confession, Unction (the Sacrament of Healing) even the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony and Ordination, all of which has its context in, or leads us to the reception of Holy Communion in the Divine Liturgy, are the means by which we renew our life.**

Holy Theophany is not a magical “hocus pocus” act. It is a consecration. It is a time for sanctification, and perhaps more concisely a re-dedication to what is sacred. But it first recognizes and acknowledges that

there is something that is Sacred. It acknowledges that there are higher purposes than what we perceive.

**The time of the Feast of Holy Theophany can best be described as the time when we re-claim all that is sacred. It is not just a time to receive a blessing. It is a time to be illumined, to be awakened to be vigilant and prepared. As recipients of God's mercy, of God's grace and His blessing we participate as agents of His mercy, His grace and His blessing. This means that the Feast which takes place at the start of every New Year is a time to be active and not passive.**

Second, we will totally miss the point of the Feast of the Holy Nativity and Theophany if we disregard, first and foremost, that our time together as the church, our huddle in the house of God, our prayers, and our confession equips us for every challenge, every struggle, and every difficulty. We are called (together) to a holy priesthood as stewards of the God's gifts – our talents, our skills, our time and resources. That calling is to be his partners in renewing, restoring, healing and saving.

Holy Theophany, therefore, is a time of recommitting ourselves to Christ. It is a time of personal renewal. It is much more than just making New Year's resolutions. Beyond resolutions, we are called to being committed to Christ; to understand what it means to be baptized "into Christ." Consequently, Christians pray to use good judgment, to make good choices in a world, because Christians believe and understand, first of all, that God is God, and we are His servants. That God is uncreated and we are stewards and priests of His creation. You and I, clergy and laity are called by God to bless, to renew and restore: to heal, to love, to forgive and to save. This task and calling is to commit ourselves and our entire life—whatever the cost; to this mission.

Finally, Theophany, like the Holy Cross, *prepares* us for every challenge, every difficulty, every adversity, every disaster. Theophany *equips* us to face every challenge, every difficulty, every adversity, every disaster, because our incarnate Lord, who has fully entered this life—and who has, by His own death invaded Hades, has triumphantly conquered all. Together with Him by virtue of our Baptism, and as members of His Kingdom, we are also victorious.

## **Prayer**

O Lord Jesus Christ our God, cleanse us now as we draw near to Thy Holy table and again, Renew us as we are reminded of our sacred commitment as those who are called to holiness. Shower us with your divine grace that we may be purified in mind, body and soul at the beginning of this New Year. Establish us in the Faith, illumine are hearts to ways of love, and keep us in your protective care. For Thou art He who dost bless and sanctify all things and unto Thee do we ascribe glory: to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. A-men.