

## **The Feast of Lights**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

In today's Gospel reading, the Gospel for the Sunday after the Theophany of the Lord, we heard the wonderful prophecy of Isaiah,

“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned.”

This prophecy, like so many others uttered by Isaiah, so many centuries ago, found its fulfillment in the Person of Jesus Christ.

As we know, the Baptism of our Lord, which we celebrated yesterday and continue to celebrate the entire week, is known by three names: Theophany, Epiphany, and the Feast of Lights.

The word Theophany means manifestation of God, while Epiphany means manifestation from above. And both of these names very clearly speak of the revelatory nature of the event, for in the Baptism of the Lord, the One God who dwells on high manifested Himself for the first time clearly, that is without allegory or symbols, as a Trinity of Persons.

The Son of God received baptism at the hands of a servant, while the Father bore witness saying “This is My Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased” and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed, as we sing in the Troparion, the truthfulness of His word.

But why is the Baptism of the Lord also called the Feast of Lights?

Certainly the prophecy of Isaiah helps to explain the reason why, for he says that the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and a Light has dawned upon those who lived in the shadow of death.

This Light of course is Jesus Christ, for following His Baptism in the Jordan River, and His forty day sojourn in the wilderness where He overcame the temptations of the devil, the Lord began His public ministry – revealing the brightness of His glory through His divine teaching and miracles.

Yet, the Light of which we speak here is also God the Father. And we profess this in the Creed when we say that the Son is Light of Light, true God of true God; for He and the Father are both of the same essence, that is both the Father and the Son are completely and fully God, sharing the full brightness of divinity.

And likewise the Holy Spirit is Light, for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit share all things in common in that they have the same divine nature.

And so we see that the Theophany, or manifestation of God, is not only a manifestation that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but also a revelation of Holy Trinity as the One God in Three Persons, the One God dwells in unapproachable Light.

Yet historically, the reason why the Baptism of the Lord is called the Feast of Lights had more to do with what happened by virtue of this great event, than it did with the event itself.

Historically, the Baptism of the Lord is called the Feast of Lights because on this day those who were preparing themselves to enter the Church – the catechumens – were baptized and chrismated, joining themselves to the Body of Christ in a process called illumination.

In the early centuries of the Church, on night before the 6<sup>th</sup> of January, hundreds of men and women from various walks of life, received baptism in the Name of the Holy Trinity. And following their baptism they held candles all throughout the night as a symbol of the light of Christ which they had received into their hearts and minds.

Through baptism these men and women became adopted sons and daughters of God and living temples of the Holy Spirit. Their faces shown with radiance as their sins were forgiven, their minds were opened by the light of divine wisdom, and their hearts were set afire by the love of Christ.

Through baptism, they were recreated, reborn of water and the Spirit, and they experienced not only the refashioning of their entire beings but also the reorientation of their entire lives. They became carriers of Christ, the Light of the world, and in this Light they saw clearly how to walk the straight and narrow path to the Kingdom.

For the Christian, in the early centuries of the Church, as well as in today's modern times, the Light of Christ illumines every aspect of life.

In the light of Christ we are able to see what is profitable for our salvation and what is not, where we should walk, how we should speak, what we should think, and the manner in which we should act.

Similarly, in the light of Christ, we are also able to see where we should not go, what we should not say, and the manner in which we should not think or speak.

In the light of Christ, we are also able to see ourselves for who we really are. We are able to see where we could use improvement, we are able to identify our shortcomings, and we are able to ask the Lord for purification, illumination, and sanctification.

And it is the light of Christ, which guides us through the difficult moments of our lives, when we don't really know what lies in store for us and our loved ones, when the dark fog of the world threatens us with fear and confusion. In these times we turn to the Christ and the light of His commandments leads us in the way we should go until His Light entirely disperses the fog of this world.

And finally it is the light of Christ which alone can lead us through the dark tunnel of sickness, suffering, and death. It is the light of Christ's Kingdom to which we have been called, and it is to this light that our souls will hasten when we depart this earthly life.

The Lord told the Jews, "I have come as a Light into the world, so that whoever believes in Me should not remain in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

This is the calling of the Christian – to walk in the light of Christ's commandments and have the light of life. And it is the manifestation of this Light which we celebrate today in the Baptism of the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord has come and revealed Himself, He has shown forth as the Sun of Righteousness, the Light which enlightens every man who comes into the world, and through His Baptism He has extended this Light and His Life to us all.

Having received these great gifts once again on this Feast of Lights, this Holy Theophany, let us continue to believe and walk in this light of Christ that we may forever be children of the Light, and sharers in the Lord's Heavenly Kingdom.

Glory to Jesus Christ!