

## January 4, 2015: The Sunday before Epiphany

### Epistle: Hebrews 11:9-10, 32-40:

*By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.*

### Gospel: Mark 1:1-8:



*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.” “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’”*

*John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and with a leather belt*

*around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, “There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”*

The Feast of the Epiphany or Theophany is the manifestation or the revelation of the Holy Trinity to the world: Christ, the incarnate Son of God is in the river Jordan, the Holy Spirit descends upon Him in the form of a dove and God the Father recommends the Son: *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

In the beginning, all three persons of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) participated in the creation of man from the dust of the earth, as we read in the book of Genesis: *“Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness”* (1:26). Now, when the fullness of time had come (Gal. 4:4), man is being re-created or created anew and again, all three persons of the Holy Trinity take part in this act of man's restoration.

The presence of the Holy Spirit announces the approaching of the Era of Grace, which will start on the day of the Pentecost, fifty days after the Lord's Resurrection and ten days after His Ascension into heaven.

The event also marks the beginning of the Lord's public ministry and by His Baptism He establishes the first Sacrament, the Holy Illumination, the gateway into the Church.

All of these aspects constitute the manifestation of the Divine Providence of God for His creation and especially for man.

How wonderful to have such a loving God who never gives up on His creation!

**To Him be the glory forever and ever!**

Fr. George Bazgan

### **Sunday Fellowship**

**The following families are scheduled to look after  
this Sunday's fellowship:**

**Corbu Adrian & Maria  
Cobuz Viorel & Mușă  
Diaconu Constantin & Mariana**

**Thank you all very much!**

## *New Year Message*

**The Board of Directors and the Ladies Auxiliary  
extend their best wishes for a Happy, Healthy,  
Peaceful and Prosperous New Year to all members  
and supporters of our parish!**

**Special thanks to those who chose to spend the last  
hours of 2014 and the first hours of 2015 at  
the Romanian Center as part of our  
major fundraising event of the year,  
The New Year's Celebration!**

**THANK YOU ALL! HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

## **HOUSE BLESSING**

**On January the 6th we celebrate the Epiphany (Theophany), the  
Baptism of our Lord and Savior. Following the Divine Liturgy and the  
Greater Blessing of Water, Fr. George will begin the blessing of homes.**

**Those who are interested, please sign in the sign up sheet or call  
Fr. George at 780-473-0029.**

## **A Christian's conduct in Church**

Before I begin to address the topic of „church conduct,” it is important to address the question „Why do we come to church?”

We come to church on Sundays (the Day of the Lord) in order to reaffirm our vocation as liturgical beings, to continue our spiritual growth and to strengthen our communion with Christ and His Church which began when we were accepted into the community of the faithful through the Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Baptism, Christmation and Holy Eucharist (Communion).

For an Orthodox Christian, attending the Divine Liturgy is not only a privilege but an obligation as well. It is a privilege in as much as we, as members of the visible Church are called to bring the Eucharistic elements (bread and wine), be part of their transformation into the Body and Blood of Christ and then, partake of them in the form of the Holy Eucharist, all this in the context of the Divine Liturgy, the highest form of prayer we can offer to God. It is also our obligation to attend the Divine Liturgy, obeying thus one of the commandments of the Church.

In order to benefit the most from our presence in Church we must keep in mind a few rules:

1. We should to come to Church on time (before 10:00) in order to partake of the entire Divine Liturgy.
2. If the service is already in progress, we must stop and see what is going on. If we came in during the Scripture readings (Epistle or the Gospel), we should wait at the back of the church until the reading is over and then, quietly, take our seats.
3. We should pick up the liturgical books and follow closely the service, reading all prayers.
4. During the Divine Liturgy we are not allowed to talk to other people. We can do that at the end, during the fellowship.

**Fr. George Bazgan**

## **Membership or Contribution?**

Spiritually speaking, we become members of the Church (the mystical body of Christ) when we receive the Sacraments of Christian initiation: Baptism, Chrismation and Holy Communion, which unite us with Christ ("*Do you unite yourself unto Christ? I do*"). Saint Paul the apostle says: "*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?*" (I Cor. 6:15). So, since we are united with Christ, we are also united with the Church, His body, which He Himself established.

The Church is a divine-human institution, established by Christ, the Son of God, who was God (divine) and Man (human) at the same time and in the same person. The mission of the Church is to teach, sanctify and lead her faithful to salvation: "*And Jesus came and spoke to them (the apostles), saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age'*" (Matthew 28:18-20).

The Church as a human institution/community was established on the day of the Pentecost, when three thousand people were baptized: ..."*and that day about three thousand souls were added to them*" (to the apostles) (Acts 2:41).

From the very beginning, the Church was supported materially by her faithful/members, as we read in the same Book of Acts: "*Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need*" (4:32-35).

Since **the churches in North America and their priests don't receive any material support whatsoever from any government**, it is imperative that those who have been accepted into the community of the faithful (the Church) as spiritual members, contribute with their time and money, thus reaffirming their membership to the divine-human institution, the Church, and assisting her to continue her mission in the world.

It is for the reason of this double membership (spiritual and material) that the term **membership** is the appropriate one as opposed to **contribution**.

**Fr. George Bazgan**