



Remember me in Your Kingdom

Massachusetts, January 5, 2020

Sermon: “Theophany”

By Father Philip Raczka, PhD

The Great Feast of the Baptism of Christ, (Eid al Ghattas), is looked upon as the beginning of the Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation (Seer al ‘Ammadee wal Mayroon), just like Holy Thursday (Khamees al Asraar) is the beginning of the Sacrament of Holy Communion (Urbani). This is why it is such a great day for us, for by Baptism we receive salvation from Jesus Christ. We remember and celebrate the Baptism of Christ, for by it He established the Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation (Mayroon) for us. Let us examine the Gospel reading to see what Baptism means.

In the Gospel of the Baptism of Christ, we see Christ in the water being baptized by John the Baptist (Youhanna Mumoudaan). Above Christ we see the Holy Spirit (Rouh al Qudous) in the form of a dove, and we hear the voice of God the Father calling Jesus “the Beloved Son.” Thus we see the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the most Holy Trinity. When we are baptized we use the formula given by Jesus in the Gospel of Saint Matthew, which says: *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. We believe in the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, and by baptism they come to live in us. God is with us, and in us. He is not far away. This is one of the great blessings of baptism, the dwelling of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in our hearts.

In the Gospel story the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove. Jesus is one with the Holy Spirit in His divine nature. His human nature received the descent of the Holy Spirit at His baptism. The word “Christ” means “Messiah” or the “Anointed One.” Jesus was anointed in his human nature by the Holy Spirit. That is why we call Him the Christ. Jesus received the Holy Spirit in His human nature so that He could give the Holy Spirit to us. When we are chrismated at our Baptism, we receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps us to believe in Christ, to pray, and to do what is right. He also guides us to fulfill the will of God in our life, and accomplish the work that God wants us to do. The Holy Spirit gives us divine gifts of grace and virtue that we may help to spread the Kingdom of Christ in the world. Receiving the Holy Spirit separates Christian Baptism from that of John the Baptist. John the

Baptist clearly said that it was Jesus who would baptize with the Holy Spirit, not John the Baptist. Receiving the Holy Spirit is another great blessing of Baptism and Chrismation.

In the Gospel reading, we heard the Heavenly Father call Jesus the “Beloved Son.” Jesus is the Son of God by nature. He shares the same nature as the Father and Holy Spirit. In baptism, we become the adopted children of God. This is mentioned many times in the New Testament, especially by Saint Paul. Because we are the adopted children of the Father, we can say “Our Father” when we pray. The Lord’s Prayer (Abaana) is the family prayer of Christians. This divine adoption is one of the great blessings of Baptism.

Because we are all the adopted children of God, we are brothers and sisters together. That is why we should love one another, respect one another, and help one another. The Church is the home of a large family headed by God, it is not a place for fighting or discord.

We are the adopted children of God. That means also, that God wants to be close to us. He is not far away. God says in the OT, *I have not left you, you have run away from Me by your sins. Return to Me, and I will return to you.* We are meant to be close to God. That is why we pray and receive Holy Communion, and all of the other Sacraments, so that we can be close to God. If we do not make time for prayer, and participating in the Divine Liturgy, then we are children separated from our Heavenly Father.

When we donate in the collection, we are showing our thanksgiving to our Father. We are thanking Him for all of His blessings. We are not paying dues for a club. And if we do not donate, or donate only a token amount, we are saying we are not grateful to God, or worse, we are saying that God did not bless us. The word “Anaphora” means offering, we are offering to God the Bread and Wine, and all of our other gifts. The word “Sacrifice” (Qorbaan in Arabic, or Qorbono in Syriani) means a gift given to God. If we do not give, then we are not completely participating in the Liturgy. Because we give to God, He responds by giving to us the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion. The Gift that we receive from God is much greater than the one that we give to Him. That is how God is: He wants us to do our part, and His part is much greater than ours, but He demands that we do our part.

Christ established the Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation by being baptized in the Jordan River. We receive many blessings and benefits from these Sacraments. The few that I discussed today are:

- God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – lives in our hearts.
- We receive the grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit so that we can believe, and live our lives according to the will of God.
- We become the adopted children of God. We become God’s family.

Glory be to Jesus Christ who has given us such great blessings.