



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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Repentance and Faith **Week of January 15, 2017**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight --" John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1: 1-8)

The Holy Evangelist Mark reports at the beginning of his Gospel that the very first message of the Baptist was the call to repentance. In only a few short verses later, he also reports that the very first message of our Lord Jesus Christ was similar: *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel"* (Mark 1:15).

The two cornerstones of our salvation were summarized in these few words of our Lord: *“Repent and believe.”* Repentance and faith continue throughout our entire lives and are the very cornerstones of the process of working out our salvation. Here’s how St. Theophan the Recluse describes it:

Repentance and faith lead a person who seeks salvation back and forth between each other. Repentance weighs him down with the burden of his sins and frightens him with the impartial judgment of God’s righteousness. But faith comes along and shows him the Deliverer Who has taken away the sins of the world. He who repents cleaves to the Deliverer and, having laid down the burden of his sins through Confession, joyfully runs after Him along the path of His commandments. In this manner faith is born of repentance and is founded on it. He who repents holds firmly onto faith according to his feeling of deliverance. Faith is alive through repentance. Without repentance faith would be like a sapling which is without a life-giving flow of sap – withered and incapable of giving life.

The Great Feast of our Lord’s Nativity has passed, and the Greater Feast of His Theophany is upon us. At Christmas we celebrated His birth; at Theophany, we will celebrate the reason for that birth – the sanctification of the world. The One Who enters the waters of Baptism does so not to be cleansed, but to cleanse. He comes to make clean that which we through sin have made foul; the All Pure One washes the impurity of the world by His own Life Giving Presence.

We will come together next week, Brothers and Sisters, for our celebration and *re-presenting* of that great Gift in the Great Blessing of the Waters on Wednesday evening, the eve of the Feast. This Sunday, the Sunday before the Holy Theophany, we begin our preparations. How to continue them? By repentance and faith: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel”* (Mark 1:15).

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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