



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

306 W. Main Street
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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<http://EntranceMission.org>

Pointing to Jesus January 24, 2021

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is baptized! In the Jordan!

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.

With these words from Sunday's Gospel lesson St. Matthew begins the story of our Lord's public ministry. After entering the waters of the Jordan to be baptized by the Holy Forerunner, Jesus begins His preaching and His great acts of mercy and healing in Galilee – Galilee of the Gentiles, St. Matthew says. Soon thereafter, John the Forerunner is put in prison for his fearless preaching against the adultery of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee.

Once many years ago I had occasion to visit a famous art museum in Munich, Germany. I remember very little from the visit except for one specific moment as I wandered the rooms and halls filled with art. As I turned a corner in the museum I saw a large painting of the Holy Forerunner. Gaunt and virtually emaciated, looking like a common Medieval peasant, he pointed to a figure that stood off to his right, the Lord Jesus. The pointing finger of John was a popular theme in Medieval art. It was clear to anyone seeing the painting that John was acting out the words of the Gospel, "Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world." I also knew that it was a way to remind anyone who saw the painting of the task of the ordinary Christian to do likewise: to point to Jesus in every circumstance

of their own lives, in their own contexts and in their own times; to point by thought, word and deed for others to see and know clearly that Jesus Christ is indeed the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world.

We live in a time in which this task needs to be carried out with boldness and care. The world of our time barely even acknowledges the reality of sin, much less of a way in which it can be healed. People go about their lives seeking ways to succeed, to put themselves first in line before others, to “feather their own nests,” to use the old phrase. The churches are empty on Sundays, not just because of the pandemic, but because people are more interested in pursuing their own entertainments; they would rather find ways to take it easy, to sleep, to shop or to pursue outdoor activities - anything but prayer and praise to the One Who created them and Who waits to redeem them. To point to Jesus requires one to remind them of the hopelessness of their lives apart from God and the possibility of eternal life with the One Who waits to receive them.

During this time of pandemic, we point to Jesus when we turn to Him in faith. The example of our prayer for those who suffer and for those who have died is a vital way of pointing to the Lord. The ultimate hope we have in Him and the acknowledgment that it is always He Who heals through the hands of the doctors and nurses is a witness that makes our faith in Him clear. The awareness that even when death comes upon those who suffer so grievously ends not in darkness but in the Light of His merciful presence even there – this simple awareness is a sign to others that only Jesus Christ is worthy of our most fervent efforts, the hope in Whom no one ever trusts in vain. We point to Him by our presence in church, by the kindness of everyday actions and by our acceptance of the sinner in spite of the grievousness of the sin that holds the sinner captive. For we are all sinners, and none of us may ever come before Him with the arrogance of self-righteousness.

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, Brothers and Sisters, is our faith. Like the Forerunner before us, let us point to Him in thought, in word, in deed, by prayer and by acts of kindness for all people, grievous sinners like each of us. Let us do so in the knowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ has indeed come, the Savior of the World.

Fr. Elias

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