



My Beloved Ones,

I pray that each one of you had a spiritually uplifting feast of the Nativity, full of warmth and joy with friends and family. In a culture that is all too ready to begin preparing for the next moment of materialism, it is sometimes easy to forget that Christmas does not need to end on December 26th, but that the 12 Days of Christmas continue after the feast, in order to connect several celebrations in the life of our Lord, all of which demonstrate the way in which we are also called to live: with obedience, and humility.

We ought to remember that, until the year 386, the Θεοφάνια, or the Epiphany—when all three Persons of the Holy Trinity were manifested in one place, at one time—was considered the more major feast, and the Birth of our Lord was included with it on January 6th. It was St. John Chrysostom who advocated for celebrating the feasts on separate dates, but close to one another,

connected by this festive spirit.

On January 1st, for example, we commemorated the περιτομή, the Feast of the Circumcision of our Lord: when, on the eighth day after His Nativity, the Son of God submitted to the sign of the Covenant; and when He received the name which the Angel spoke: “Jesus”, God saves.

If the Circumcision seems a strange thing to commemorate to some, let us think about its meaning inside the Nativity season. Through His Incarnation in poor human flesh, He demonstrated, not only love for mankind, but His humility. And in undergoing the physical sign of God’s chosen people, he also demonstrated obedience to God’s Law, and likewise, humility. In fact, this obedience also points the way to this Sunday’s Feast, and the end of the Christmas season, the the Θεοφάνια, the Theophany, or the Epiphany.

Consider that, as the Incarnate and sinless Word of God, Jesus Christ did not need to be baptized in the Jordan, for He had no need of purification Himself. John the Baptist, recognizing Him, even saysm “*I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?*” (*Matthew 3:14*) And yet Jesus undergoes the Baptism in order to demonstrate the proper way to us, His followers. Indeed, the Baptism that we are baptized into is also a sign that we belong to the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—but unlike physical circumcision, baptism is a spiritual seal made on the hearts of every Orthodox Christian.

As we begin this civil New Year, may we celebrate this Sunday’s Great Feast, and all its miracles and blessings, as faithful Orthodox Christians: prepared to follow our Incarnate Lord and Savior on the true path of submission to God with humble and contrite hearts—both this year, and all the days of our lives. Καλή Χρονία!

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta