

Dearly beloved: Christ is born!

On this, the first day of 2017, we stand between the feast of the birth of Christ on December 25 and His baptism on January 6 and we have two commemorations always on January 1, the first is the circumcision of our Lord Jesus and the second is the feast of St. Basil the Great, whose Liturgy we celebrate today, who fell asleep in the Lord on January 1 over one thousand, six hundred years ago. We are eight days from Christ's birth and, according to the Law given by God to Moses; every male child would be circumcised on that day as a physical sign of the covenant between God and His Chosen People. On that same eighth day the child would receive his name. We have kept this custom so that in the book of blessings there is a prayer for naming a newborn child on the eighth day. The Son of God born in the flesh begins His days fulfilling every precept of the very Law which He gave to Moses so that, in fulfilling the Law in all its entirety, He would expand the people of Israel to become the Israel of the Messiah, opening the doors to those who were not Jews, to every person born into the world, to have life and fellowship with and in Him. Jesus Christ moves beyond circumcision as a sign of belonging to the Father by giving to us baptism in water. It is by baptism that we are created anew, given life in the Holy Spirit, that we become the Israel of the Messiah, sons and daughters of the Most High God.

Jesus told this to Nicodemus, that to have life in Him one must be born again of water and the Spirit. Jesus speaks here of baptism. And as He hung upon the Cross, when His side was pierced, blood and water poured out. The saints have interpreted these two as images of His Precious Blood which we receive in Holy Communion and the water of baptism into which we all have been plunged, washing away our sins, bringing us into communion with God.

One who had fellowship with God is St. Basil the Great. He came from a family of ten children that counts many saints besides Basil including St. Emelia, St. Macrina, St. Theosebia and St. Gregory of Nyssa. He lived simply, assisting those in need and teaching about Jesus Christ with both his writings and homilies and by his very way of life. One of the hymns says of him, "By your pure way of life, O holy Basil, you brought Christ, the Fountain of Life, into your soul. You poured out streams of water on the world, from which the faithful of the Church drink, praising the fruit of your lips. They offer the bounty of grace to Him Who glorifies your memory throughout all ages."

Saint Basil, like we all were, was washed in the waters of baptism. And he became as stream, pouring forth the Fountain of Life, Christ our God to all who knew him. We honor him as a saint, a holy one of God, whose life was filled with Christ. We revere him and aspire to be where he is now: in the heavenly courts giving worship to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit and praying for every one of us that we, like he, may live in repentance, daily turning from sins, repenting from those we commit, showing mercy to one another and those we meet that we may enjoy the fullness of life in Christ, tasting it here and now upon this earth and join all of the saints who are in heaven in the fullness of communion with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit to Whom is due all glory forever.