

**Koinonia Year One—January**  
**Content from *Growing Faithful***  
**Scripture from the NRSV Bible**

**Sunday Before Theophany (or Epiphany)**  
**(January 2-5)**

2 Timothy 4:5-8 Mark 1:1-8

(Note: If this Sunday falls on January 1st the Circumcision of our Lord is celebrated, and the Scripture readings are Colossians 2:8-12 and Luke 2:20-21, 40-52.)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

The time of Bethlehem and Nazareth is drawing to a close. After about thirty years of hidden life, which were made holy by humble work with his hands and by obedience, Jesus is soon to be revealed to the world. In the same way that, in spirit, we went to the manger in Bethlehem, we shall go, guided by the angels, towards the river where the Father will manifest his Son. (A Monk of the Eastern Church, *The Year of Grace of the Lord*)

**HEAR the Word of God—**

**2 Timothy 4:5-8**

*5As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.*

*6As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. 7I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*

*8From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

**Mark 1:1-8**

*1The beginning of the good news (or gospel) of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

*2As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; 3the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" 4John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5And all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and honey. 7He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8I have baptized you with (or in) water; but he will baptize you with (or in) the Holy Spirit."*

## SHARE thoughts and insights—

- God's messenger...
  - Who was the messenger God sent ahead of his Son to prepare his way?
  - How would you describe John?
  - What was John's purpose and message?
- How do we *prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight* (verse 3)?
- What is a *baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins* (verse 4)?
  - Why is this baptism important?
  - What must we do to receive this baptism? (See verse 5c.)
  - Why is it difficult for us to confess our sins?
- What is the difference between the baptism of John and the baptism of the Lord Jesus? (See verse 8 for a start.)

The Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation are not separated in the Orthodox Church because one is baptism with water, and the other is baptism with the Spirit. Baptism is for cleansing; Chrismation is for power. 'Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God' (John 3:5). Through the Sacrament of Chrismation Jesus did in fact baptize us with the Holy Spirit just as He baptized his apostles on Pentecost. Through the Sacrament of Chrismation every Orthodox Christian is anointed with 'the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.' (Father Anthony Coniaris, *The Message of the Sunday Gospel Readings, Volume 1*)

- In his letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, *As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully* (verse 5). Try to reword Paul's directions so they apply to you.
- Think about Paul's famous statement, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith* (verse 7).
  - What is the *good fight*?
  - What does he mean when he says that he has *finished the race*?
  - What does it mean to *keep the faith*?
- What Christians have you known about whom it could be said that they *fought the good fight, they finished the race, they kept the faith* (verse 7)?
  - Tell their stories. May they inspire (y)our faith!

## **GROW in faith—**

The message of John the Baptist was a call to repentance. Repentance was needed to prepare the way for what lay beyond it. Repentance was "to prepare the way of the Lord, (to) make his paths straight." Repentance was needed to clear the way for the coming of the Holy Spirit. It was needed to lead us to the Kingdom of God. "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand," said Jesus. Repentance opens the door to let the great light of God's presence enter our minds and hearts. So, there is a close connection between repentance and the Holy Spirit, repentance and the Kingdom of God, repentance and light: "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Matt. 4:16-17). Repentance is not merely something negative, i.e., feeling sorry for our sins and asking God's forgiveness: it is positive. It calls attention to the many blessings that lie beyond it, that come after it: the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom of God, the forgiveness of sins, and God's light that dispels the darkness of sin and death. (Father Anthony Coniaris, *The Message of the Sunday Gospel Readings, Volume 1*)

## **SERVE one another in love—**

*"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Mark 1:3b).*

## **PRAY—**

*Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.  
Lead me in your truth, and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I wait all day long (Psalm 25:4-5).*