

St. George the Trophy Bearer

Sunday School Bulletin

JANUARY 2024

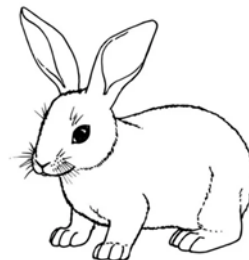
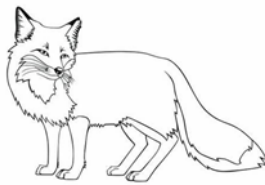
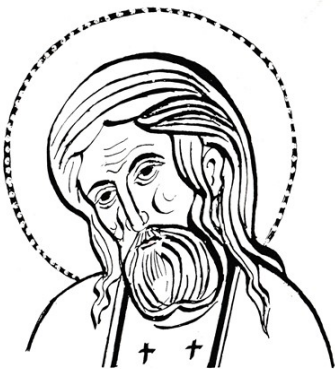
January Saints

St. Seraphim of Sarov

On January 2, we commemorate the life of St. Seraphim of Sarov. This beloved saint's humility and kindness to both people and animals provide an excellent example for all of us. St. Seraphim, named by his parents Prochor Moshnin, was born in Kursk, Russia, in 1759. His parents were devout Christians who took him to church and taught him the things of God. At an early age, miracles began to happen in Prochor's life. For example, when he was only 7 years old, he once fell from the bell tower (which was 3 or 4 stories tall) of the Kursk Cathedral. He should have been seriously injured, but God worked a miracle, and he was unharmed. When he was 10, he became very ill. One night, the Mother of God appeared to him and told him that he would soon be healed. A few days later, a wonder-working icon of the Theotokos was processing through Kursk when rain suddenly began to pour down from the clouds. The procession took a shortcut through Prochor's family's yard. His mother carried her sick boy outside to venerate the icon as it passed, and he recovered from his illness that very day.

Throughout the early years of his life, Prochor studied the scriptures and attended church. At age 19, he went to live in a monastery so that he could become a monk. At the monastery, he worked hard and prayed hard. Years later, at age 27, he was tonsured as the monk "Seraphim," and a few years after that, he was ordained to the priesthood.

After he became a priest, St. Seraphim served God in a variety of ways. He served as the priest for the monastery in Diveyevo; he lived for a while in solitude in the forest; he prayed on a rock for 1,000 days/nights; and much more. Throughout these experiences he welcomed all visitors, whether they were children, adults, or animals. He befriended many animals during his time in the forest such as wolves, foxes, lizards, rabbits, birds, and even a large bear. All the while, he worked at praying the Jesus Prayer. Sometimes when he prayed, he shone with holy light because of how close he was to God. The Theotokos appeared to St. Seraphim 12 times over the course of his lifetime. St. Seraphim of Sarov intercede for us!



St. Athanasius the Great

We commemorate St. Athanasius on January 18th every year. He was born in Alexandria in the 3rd century. St. Athanasius was a good student and could have studied any subject, but from a young age he was only interested in the things of God and the Church. He dedicated himself to the study of the Old and New Testaments and served the Church as a deacon, then as a priest and finally as bishop of Alexandria when he was only 30 years old. During his life, St. Athanasius was a champion of the one true faith and he spent many years fighting against wrong belief and the worship of other Gods. He was exiled from the city five times during his life, but in 366 he was brought back to Alexandria to live out the last years of his life. St. Athanasius wrote important books of theology as well as a book about his friend St. Anthony the Great.

The Feast of the Three Holy Hierarchs

St. Basil - St. John Chrysostom - St. Gregory the Theologian

While each of these great men have their own feast days, we celebrate them together on January 30th. According to tradition, during the late 11th century, there were arguments among the people about which of these theologians was the greatest. Some believed that St. Basil was above the other two because they admired the saint's ability to clearly communicate the mysteries of our faith, his help in organizing monastic life, and his leadership in the struggle against heresy. Others preferred St. Gregory and protested that their saint was the closest to achieving theosis. Finally, there were those who believed that John Chrysostom was the greatest of the three because he wrote with such eloquence that we are still using his Divine Liturgy today. Three groups formed, calling themselves the Basilians, Gregorians and Joannites. All of this arguing about one saint versus the others was only leading to bad feelings between Christians. Instead of promoting the saints, the supporters of each saint were arguing and tearing each other down. Then, one night, a bishop named John Mauropous had a dream where the three holy hierarchs appeared. The three holy hierarchs explained that they are all equal before God and that they had no desires to be pitted against each other. Then the saints requested that they would be celebrated together on a single feast day. And that is how we came to have the feast of the 3 Holy Hierarchs!

Troparion: (tone 1) Let us who love their words gather together, honoring with hymns the three great torch-bearers of the triune Godhead. You have enlightened the world with sweetly-flowing streams of wisdom, and fill all creation with rivers of heavenly knowledge. Ceaselessly intercede for us, asking for great mercy for our souls before the Holy Trinity!

<i>"Young people must keep</i> clearly in mind the <i>Christian's purpose in life.</i> They must bend every energy to one task, the winning of the heavenly crown." -St Basil the Great	<i>"A man must himself be cleansed before cleansing others;</i> himself become wise, that he may make others wise; BECOME LIGHT <i>before he can give light;</i> draw near to God before he can bring others near God." -St. Gregory Theologian	<i>"Repentance consists in no longer doing the same things.</i> For he who reverts to the same sins is like a dog returning to its vomit." -St John Chrysostom
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How to Celebrate the 3 Holy Hierarchs

- Recite the Nicene Creed, a mark of the triumph of Orthodoxy over Arianism. The three Holy Hierarchs played an important role in defending the Holy Trinity.
- Say a prayer for any monastics in your community, asking for St. Basil's intercession.
- Find an icon of the holy hierarchs for your icon corner
- Pray the tropars for today during your daily prayers.
- Go to Divine Liturgy, and consider the words of St. John Chrysostom as you pray.

Colour Holy Hierarch colouring pages, and write poems to the Trinity to honour God on this feast day.

About the Feast -Theophany

Saint John the Baptist had been preparing the people of Israel for Christ by baptizing them with water as an outward sign of repentance. He told to them to look for the One, however, who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. When Christ came to John to be baptized in the Jordan, John protested and tried to prevent him saying "I have need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" How could he baptize the Messiah? Yet he did so at Christ's urging in order to "fulfill all righteousness." **Then the Spirit in the form of a dove descended upon Him as the Father said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16).** After this, Christ went into the wilderness to fast, pray, and be tempted by the devil. The baptism of Christ is truly a "theophany"— which means a manifestation or revealing of God himself. **The world was granted a manifestation of the Trinity in the voice of the Father who sent the Spirit in the form of a dove upon His Son.** In this great feast, we celebrate the revelation of our Lord as God. Theophany is also known as the "Feast of Lights" in that Jesus, by His baptism in the River Jordan, enlightened the world. Christ's baptism also marks the renewal of humanity: our Lord is cleansed and He shows us how we must be cleansed of sin by drowning it in the waters which He blessed by entering them.

Many Orthodox Churches offer two services of the Great Sanctification of Water on Theophany: indoors, where the faithful can drink the water and take it home, and outdoors at a stream, river, lake or ocean.

Ways to Celebrate the Feast

1. Attend Divine Liturgy and Learn the Hymn

It is wonderful service filled with beautiful symbolism and the Great Blessing of the Waters. Come and see the waters be blessed, and be sprinkled by the holy water, and take home your own bottle of holy water.

The hymn for the feast is also beautiful. It goes:

At your Baptism in the Jordan river, O Lord, the worship due to the Holy Trinity was made manifest. For the voice of the Father bore witness to you by calling you His beloved Son; and the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the truth of His word. O Christ our God, who have revealed yourself and enlightened the world, glory to you!

Learning this hymn will be especially helpful for your family's house blessing later on.

2. Bring Holy Water Home

All of the faithful are invited to take bottles of the blessed water home with them after Liturgy and throughout the festal period. Your bottle can be anything that you would like and can then be kept in your icon corner. By having a bottle in your icon corner, you bear witness to the feast, and to Christ's baptism and the blessing of the waters, throughout the year.

3. Sing "As Many as Have Been Baptized"

Our children love to sing the hymn "As Many as Have Been Baptized" at the top of their lungs during this festal period! The hymn is quite simple and goes:

"All you baptized in Christ,

You have all clothed yourselves in Christ. Alleluia!"

You can sing it at the end of your family prayer times, at the dinner table, and even in the car on the way to school. It is a beautiful way to connect the baptism of Christ with your own baptism.

4. Look at pictures of Your own and your family member's Baptisms

The Feast of Theophany can be a good time to pull out some old pictures of your baptism. Take a few minutes during the day to bring out pictures, baptismal garments, or baptismal candles to remind yourself that you are part of the Church, that you belong to Christ.

5. Watch Videos of the Blessing of the Waters

There are MANY videos on YouTube that show the blessing of the oceans. Children (and adults!) will be fascinated to realize that the oceans are actually blessed with holy water each year. Take a few minutes to watch some videos that show the blessing of the Atlantic Ocean or one for the Pacific Ocean.

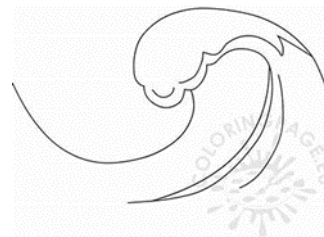
Now is a great time to sign up for a house blessing. The service of the Blessing of the Waters, which began in the church, is finished with the sprinkling of Holy Water in the home. We are inviting God to come in and be with us in our house all year long, protecting us and giving us all we need.

Read the Old Testament story about Noah and the Ark (Genesis 6:5-8:22). We find a foretelling of the Baptism of Christ in the story of Noah's Ark in three symbolic ways: The Ark, The Water, and The Dove.

The Ark **was built for the salvation of the faithful when God sent the flood to cleanse the Earth and wash anew His creation. The Church is our "ark" and it is the place where we celebrate the blessed sacrament of Baptism.**

The Water **of baptism cleanses our souls from its sins and renews us as we are born into Christ.**

The Dove **that the prophet Noah sent out of the Ark reminds us of the dove that comes down from God the Father to anoint God the Son in the feast of Theophany and the Holy Spirit that we are sealed with in Holy Baptism.**



Decorate a Jar for Holy Water: Look for empty jars with smooth faces, like maple syrup bottles. Next, you can print out an icon of the Theophany from the internet, sized to fit the face of the jar, and glue it, along with some sparkly craft jewels to the glass. A piece of ribbon can be tied to the neck of the bottle as a finishing touch so that everyone in the family can bring a beautifully decorated jar to liturgy on the feast in order to take some of that powerful, sacramental water home.

