

*You have scattered Your enemies with Your mighty arm.
The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours;
The world and all its fullness, You have founded them. (Ps. 89:8-11)*

And
*Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD! Awake as in the ancient days,
In the generations of old.*

Are You not the arm that cut Rahab apart, And wounded the serpent?

Are You not the One who dried up the sea, The waters of the great deep;

That made the depths of the sea a road For the redeemed to cross over?

So the ransomed of the LORD shall return,

And come to Zion with singing,

With everlasting joy on their heads.

They shall obtain joy and gladness;

Sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isa. 51:9-11)

Reading along without a commentary, it would be easy to assume that *Rahab* is a country or a ruler. However, it is the name of an ancient chaos sea-monster. But in the Psalms and Isaiah, this pagan sea-monster is vanquished and subdued by the God of Israel. It is not meant as a literal account. The imagery has been taken up to express God's dominion over all things and His victory over chaos. Israel, brought into the Promised Land, is God's ordering of the world, a restoration of "Eden," in a manner of speaking (Ez. 36:35).

All of this imagery is taken up in the Christian faith in the Church's meditations on the Baptism of Christ. The Western tradition (Catholic and Protestant) has long neglected this feast, only giving it attention in the past 50 years or so. In the East, the Baptism of Christ (Theophany) follows Christmas by 12 days, the same day that the West honors the visit of the Magi. A major reason for the West's neglect of this feast, I suspect, is its strangeness to the later atonement theories that became popular. Jesus has no sin to be washed away; He is guilty of nothing. His Baptism thus stands as a contradiction to later Western accounts of the sacrament.

But in the Eastern Church, the Baptism of Christ takes up these Old Testament references of struggle with the watery chaos. Christ's entry into the waters is understood as a foreshadowing of His entrance into Hades. It is a defeat of the hostile powers. The same theme runs throughout the sacrament of Baptism itself. The destruction of the demons is easily the strongest theme within that service:

Because of the tender compassion of Your mercy, O Master, You could not endure to behold mankind oppressed by the Devil; but You came and saved us. We confess Your grace. We proclaim Your mercy. We do not conceal Your gracious acts. You have delivered the generation of our mortal nature. By Your birth You sanctified a Virgin's womb. All creation magnifies You, for You have revealed Yourself. For You, O our God, have revealed Yourself upon the earth, and have dwelled among men. You hallowed the streams of Jordan, sending down upon them from heaven Your Holy Spirit, and crushed the heads of the demons ["dragons" in some translations] who lurked there.

The poetry of Psalm 74 becomes part of the Baptismal service, and thus a Paschal hymn:

For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.

You divided the sea by Your strength:

You crushed the heads of the dragons in the waters.

You broke the heads of leviathan [another sea monster] in pieces, and gave him to be food to the people inhabiting the wilderness.

You cleaved the fountain and the flood:

You dried up mighty rivers.

By Fr. Stephen Freeman

The day is Yours, the night also is Yours:

You have prepared the light and the sun. (Ps. 74:12-16)

For those who are unfamiliar with Pascha and Baptism in an "Eastern key," this language can seem quite odd. It is the dominant image of salvation within the Eastern Church. The great hymn of Pascha, repeated seemingly hundreds of times in that season, is, "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death." It is not a hymn of payment, or punishment, but of going into the strongman's kingdom, binding him and setting free those who are held captive. The heads of the dragons are crushed, the heads of leviathan are broken in pieces, Rahab has been cut apart.

I have seen false comparisons between East and West, where the West is credited with an emphasis on the Cross and the East with an emphasis on the Resurrection. It is a comparison that only a Westerner would make. Within the East, the Cross and the Resurrection are not separated – they are a single action devastating the adversary, leading captivity captive and setting all of the captives free. This is the Lord's Passover.

Dragons and Chaos beware.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND SERVICES

~~~ Church School Today~~~

**Family Bowling Outing Feb. 11th following Pancake Breakfast in Cambridge Springs. 1-4pm**

**THIS MONTH—**

- **Men's Fellowship Meeting ~ TODAY - following Coffee Hour**

- **Vespers for St. Anthony The Great ~ Tuesday, Jan 16<sup>th</sup> 6pm -**

**With a talk on the Desert Fathers to follow.**

- **Orthodox Bible Study – Thursday Jan. 18th– 6pm @ The Tarot Bean Café- Meadville, PA**

- **MARCH FOR LIFE – Friday, Jan. 19<sup>th</sup> – Washington D.C.**

- **Pan-Orthodox Blessing of Lake Erie – Sat. Jan. 20<sup>th</sup> 12noon – Dobbs Landing -- Voodoo Brewery to Follow for lunch**

- **Altar Servers and Readers Meeting – Sun. Jan. 21<sup>st</sup> immediately following the kissing of the cross. (Parents should attend)**

- **Ladies Altar Meeting – Sun. Jan. 21<sup>st</sup> Following Coffee Hour**

- **Erie March for Life - Sat. Jan. 27<sup>th</sup> 11am Perry Square, Erie**

- **Parish Council Meeting – Wed. Feb. 7th**

- **GREAT AND HOLY LENT BEGINS Feb. 19th**

## MISSIONS TEAM

Anyone wishing to serve as a missionary for a summer trip may inquire of the missions team. Also, OCMC sponsors various trips around the world. See the poster in the Hall.

\*Please support our Kenyan Orthodox children. Please contact Marilyn Filipos. Thank you for your donations to the Kenyan children.

**Team Party/Meeting – Fri. Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup> 5pm-8pm @ the Parish House**

"Rejoice" scripture verse for the week:

The humble also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice In the Holy One of Israel. (Isa 29:19)

# Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church

25636 N. Mosiertown Rd Crossingville, PA

1641 Rev. Fr. Daniel Mathewson – Rector

**Lord's Day – Jan. 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018** Parish phone:

814-734-3801 Find us on the Web at:

[www.orthodoxcrossingville.org](http://www.orthodoxcrossingville.org) or on Face

book: Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church



## CHRIST IS BAPTIZED IN THE JORDAN!

**32nd SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST — Tone**

**7. Leavetaking of the Theophany.** St. Sava I, first Archbishop of Serbia (1237). The Holy Fathers slain at Sinai and Raithu: Isaiah, Sabbas, Moses and his disciple Moses, Jeremiah, Paul, Adam, Sergius, Domnus, Proclus, Hypatius, Isaac, Macarius, Mark, Benjamin, Eusebius, Elias, and others (4th-5th c.). *St. Nina (Nino), Equal-to-the-Apostles and Enlightener of the Georgians (355).* St. Joseph Analytinus of Raithu (4th c.). Ven. Theodulus, son of Ven. Nilus of Sinai (5th c.). Ven. Stephen, Abbot of Chenolakkos Monastery near Chalcedon (8th c.).

PLEASE INCLUDE THESE OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN YOUR DAILY PRAYERS: Those in need –Fr. Andrew, Fr. David, Mat. Donna, Fr. John, Fr. Nicholas, Fr. Paul, Fr. George, Mat. Suzanne, Melissa, Meghan, Pearl, Karen, John, Mary, Stavros, Marilyn, Theona, Sara, Eugene, John, Ann, Thomas, Catherine, Timothy, Jeremiah, Renee, Delani, Emily, The Homebound... Vincent, Tanya, Richard, Helen, John, Irene, Ruth, Josephine, William, Claudia... Travelers..Dankos ...Catechumens –Rick and Christian Our Missionaries Abroad...Fr. David and Mt. Rozanne, Military servers...Greg ...Departed Orthodox...Newly Departed – Ann, Katherine. Vernon, Paul, James, Andrew, Peter, Paul, Margaret, Michael Mary Ann, Timothy special requests... Anthony, Ian, Paul, Daleen, Penni, James, Sean, Liam, Susan, James, Joel, Jen, Roger, Jasmine, Cassandra ....

**Today's Hymns** Tone 7 Troparion (*Resurrection*)  
**By Thy Cross Thou didst destroy death.**  
**To the thief Thou didst open Paradise.**  
**For the Myrrhbearers Thou didst change weeping into joy,**  
**and Thou didst command Thy disciples, O Christ God,**  
**to proclaim that Thou art risen, //**  
**granting the world great mercy.**

**Tone 1 Troparion of the Feast**  
**When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan,**  
**the worship of the Trinity was made manifest.**  
**For the voice of the Father bore witness to Thee,**  
**and called Thee His beloved Son;**  
**and the Spirit in the form of a dove**  
**confirmed the truthfulness of His word.**  
**O Christ our God, Who hast revealed Thyself //**  
**and hast enlightened the world, glory to Thee.**

**Tone 7 Kontakion** (*Resurrection*)  
**The dominion of death can no longer hold men captive,**  
**for Christ descended, shattering and destroying its powers.**  
**Hell is bound, while the Prophets rejoice and cry:**  
**“The Savior has come to those in faith; //**  
**enter, you faithful, into the Resurrection!”**

**Tone 4 Kontakion of the Feast**  
**Today Thou hast shone forth to the world, O Lord,**  
**and the light of Thy countenance has been marked on us.**  
**Knowing Thee, we sing Thy praises:**  
**“Thou hast come and revealed Thyself, //**  
**O unapproachable Light.”**

**Tone 7 Prokeimenon**  
**The Lord shall give strength to His people. The Lord shall bless**  
**His people with peace. (Ps 28/29:11)**  
**v: Offer to the Lord, O ye sons of God! Offer young rams to the**  
**Lord! (Ps 28/29:1)**

**Tone 4 Prokeimenon**  
**Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord. God is the**  
**Lord and has revealed Himself to us. (Ps 117:26:27)**

**Tone 4**  
**Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!**  
**v: Bring to the Lord, O ye sons of God, bring to the Lord young**  
**rams. (Ps 28:1)**

**v: The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory**  
**thunders, the Lord upon many waters. (Ps 28:3)**

**Tone 7**

**v: It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to Thy**  
**Name, O Most High. (Ps 91/92:1)**

### **Today's Scripture Readings:**

#### **1 Timothy 1:15-17 (Epistle)**

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

#### **Luke 18:35-43 (Gospel)**

Then it happened, as He was coming near Jericho, that a certain blind man sat by the road begging. And hearing a multitude passing by, he asked what it meant. So they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And he cried out, saying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked him, saying, “What do you want Me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, that I may receive my sight.” Then Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

### When Chaos Ruled the World Part 1

In the ancient civilizations of the Near East there were strange stories about the place of chaos in the beginning of all things – and the chaos is specifically located in water. It seems odd to me that people who largely lived in arid countries should imagine the world beginning as a watery chaos – but that is certainly what they did.

The Egyptians imagined the world's beginning as a watery chaos (the god, Nun). It is from this watery thing that the god, Atum, generates himself and then creates the other gods. The Babylonian creation story, the *Enuma Elish*, said that before there were any other gods, and before the heaven and earth were set in place, there were only Apsu (the freshwater ocean) and Tiamat (the saltwater ocean). The god Marduk slayed Tiamat

(who was also a chaos creature) and from her created the heavens and the earth.

All of this, of course, seems quite foreign to the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is a sample, however, of the cultures in the midst of which their faith was revealed. It also provides a backdrop that shows how unique and striking the creation story in Genesis truly is.

There are echoes of these cosmic battles embedded in various places in the Scriptures:

*And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*

Hidden from our modern eyes but visible in the Hebrew is the “Tiamat” monster. It is within the word for “without form” (*tohu*) and “deep” (*tehom*). But in our Hebrew account, there is no slaying of a monster, no polytheistic struggle. Rather, there is God (Elohim) who simply *speaks*, and accomplishes the creation. There is a watery chaos, now raised up into a theological account of extreme sophistication. It is a repudiation of the surrounding culture-myths – but it is still rendered in a language that knows that culture.

In St. John's gospel, there is something similar. He opens with reference to the *Logos*, a concept completely familiar to earlier Greek philosophy. But where philosophy sees an abstraction, St. John proclaims the particular: this *Logos* “became flesh and dwelt among us.” He takes the language and ideas of a surrounding culture and transforms them into the stuff of true revelation. In many ways, this is very much a part of the Incarnation.

Every year around Christmas time, we begin to hear noises about Christmas trees having “pagan origins.” And there are many who rush to the defense of the poor trees. I yawn. My ancestors worshipped trees, and I daresay their later Christian descendants were glad to see the Church baptizing the trees as well as people. There simply is no “pristine” matter from which the faith starts fresh. God always speaks and reveals Himself in terms that can be assimilated. He does not destroy culture, but *fulfills* it. The Christmas *tree* is a stark reminder that the Child born on that day has a rendezvous with a Tree, and that there is no getting around it. There is a Tree at the heart of our faith, even as there was at the heart of the Garden.

CS Lewis once opined that pagan mythology consisted of “good dreams sent by God to prepare for the coming of Christ.” Such myths can also carry deep darkness and confusion – but such is the nature of a world that is broken. God does not offer us redemption by *destroying* a broken world. He does not erase or eradicate the cultures of mankind. It is only a darkened theology that imagines every production of the human imagination to be worthy only of the dung heap. That sort of destructive view belongs to the scions of Calvin and the iconoclasm of Wahabis: it is not the work of God.

The Egyptian and Mesopotamian images that found their way into the Scriptures reflect an instinct about a primal struggle. Order and well-being are not givens: they are the result of an intervention. Both the Psalms and Isaiah take some of these images up into poetic praise:

O LORD God of hosts, Who *is* mighty like You, O LORD?

Your faithfulness also surrounds You.

You rule the raging of the sea;

When its waves rise, You still them.

You have broken Rahab in pieces, as one who is slain;