



# Light of the East



## *Reflections for our Spiritual Journey*

Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church ♦ June 2018

### *The Nativity of the Holy Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John The Holy, Glorious and Preeminent Apostles Peter and Paul*



Among the Church's great feasts in honor of God's saints, two in the month of June significantly stand out from the others as they glorify the economy of God's plan for our salvation.



**The Nativity of John the Baptist** is the oldest feast in both the Greek and Latin Churches and is commemorated each year on **June 24**. On this day the mercy, miracles and wisdom of God are celebrated: His mercy toward the devout and righteous parents of St. John, the aged Zacharias and the barren Elizabeth; His miracle, in John's conception in the aged womb of his mother; His wisdom, in the dispensation of man's salvation. John's birth is the first joy sent down by God to the human race since Adam's fall, the beginning of its deliverance from the power of the devil, sin and eternal death: a Forerunner and Angelic Messenger who would prepare the way for the Lord, the Savior of the world. John's holy Nativity is the antechamber of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. We sing in the Divine Praises of today's Feast. "The star of stars, the Forerunner, is born on earth today, from a barren womb, John the beloved of God, and manifests the dawning of Christ, the

Orient from on high. The whole creation rejoices at your divine nativity: for you were shown forth as an earthly angel, O Forerunner and a heavenly man, proclaiming to us, the God of heaven incarnate".

We know John as the greatest and last prophet of the "Old Testament", who announced the arrival of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. He was the voice crying in the two-fold wilderness: in the wilderness of Jordan and in the human wilderness. By repentance, John prepared the way and by baptism in water, made the path straight. The glorious Prophet Isaiah foretold of John 700 years earlier: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight the paths of our God" (Is. 40:30); the prophet, Malachi, called John the Lord's Forerunner, an Angel sent by the Lord to prepare the way before Him (cf. Mal 3:1). The Forerunner stands at the very end of the Old Testament and at the very beginning of the New Testament. He answers in a new way the old question which people have asked from ancient times: "What is the purpose of life?" John tells us that purpose is to be spiritually fruitful; we are called to bring forth spiritual fruit, to improve the world and not to worsen it. For his indescribable ascetic struggles in the desert; for the boundless depths of his prayer and

fasting; for the great labor of preaching with which he prepared the way of the Lord; for the Baptism of the Son of God in the Jordan; for his brutal imprisonment and martyrdom — for all this the great Forerunner is now the first in the Kingdom of God after the Most-Holy Theotokos.



There are perhaps no two men more greatly revered yet so seemingly different than the **Holy, Glorious and Preeminent Apostles Peter and Paul**, whose feast is commemorated on **June 29** by both the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches. Peter, who served as the leader of the Apostles and the Church's first bishop, preached on the day of Pentecost when 3,000 were converted to the faith. Paul set forth on his great travels and was the greatest missionary the world has ever known, having authored over half of the New Testament. These men were two of the most powerful instruments ever raised up by God to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to found our holy Church. Their preaching and the power of God within them literally transformed the world. Both lived completely for Christ and both died a martyr's death in Rome.

Their power and end were the same; yet at the outset they were so different. There is Peter, the fisherman, simple and uneducated. There is Paul (then Saul), the Pharisee, brilliant and educated, learned in Jewish, Greek and Roman thought. There is Peter, emotional and impulsive, often speaking and acting hastily but always remorseful. There is Paul, seemingly cold and calculating, a powerful and even ruthless intellect, able to persecute and kill without remorse. No two men could be more different — one driven by fire and emotion, the other by coldness and intellect. But they had one thing in common — one thing that transcended their differences and made them one: a personal encounter with the Son of God. Peter encountered Christ and was raised up from his humble beginnings to a man of power. Paul encountered Christ and was lowered from his lofty position to a man of godly humility. Both gave up what they were, to become what God desired them to be and through them the whole world was changed.

Seen together, Saints Peter and Paul teach us a great lesson — that no matter who we are — no matter our backgrounds, our talents, our station in life — if we offer who we are completely to God, both our abilities and our limitations — He will make us who we are supposed to be; He can and will use us to the glory of His kingdom. If we offer ourselves completely, just as we are, whether we are a simple fisherman or a towering intellectual, the world will see God within us. Oftentimes, we look at ourselves with our limitations and inadequacies and feel we have nothing to offer to God. We shy away from serving His Church because we feel we have no skills or gifts to offer. We see others with all their gifts, and we back away thinking there is nothing within us that God can use. Many times, in our pride and arrogance, we feel we are above many of the simple tasks and labors that are so much a part of the ongoing life of God's Church.

God created us who we are and He came into the world to make us all we can be. Peter continued to be Peter and Paul continued to be Paul, but it was Christ within them that made them into all that God desired them to be. And so it is with us. If we offer ourselves to God with all our strengths and weaknesses, He will use us to the glory of his Kingdom. On the eve of this great feast, June 28, we will come together as a parish to celebrate Solemn Vespers of these two pillars of the Church; then on June 29, we will celebrate with the Divine Liturgy the feast of our beloved Apostles Peter and Paul, those "luminaries to those in darkness, two rays of the sun". As we embark on new beginnings in building up this parish and the Kingdom of God here in Roswell and beyond, let us commit ourselves attend these sacred services and to give all that we are to God as did Saints Peter and Paul, so that like them, we may radiate the love of God into a cold and unbelieving world.

