



## 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday After Pentecost Sunday Before Theophany, St. Sylvester Pope of Rome, St. Seraphim of Sarov

2 / 15 January 2012

**Troparion of the Sunday, Tone VI** — The angelic powers were at Thy tomb; / the guards became as dead men. / Mary stood by Thy grave, / seeking Thy most pure Body. / Thou didst capture hell, / not being tempted by it. / Thou didst come to the Virgin, granting life. / O Lord, Who didst rise from the dead: glory to Thee!

**St. Sylvester, Pope of Rome, Troparion, Tone IV** — The truth of things revealed thee to thy flock as a rule of faith, / a model of meekness and a teacher of abstinence / wherefore thou hast attained the heights through humility / and riches through poverty. // O hierarch Sylvester our father, entreat Christ God that our souls be saved.

**Troparion of St Seraphim of Sarov tone 4** - From thy youth up thou hast loved Christ, O blessed Saint, / and aflame with the desire to work for Him alone / thou hast contended in unceasing prayer / and laboured in the wilderness: / and gaining by compunction of heart the love of Christ, / thou hast appeared as the chosen of the Mother of God. / Therefore we cry to thee: Save us by thy prayers, O Father Seraphim.

**Forefeast of the Theophany, Troparion, Tone IV** — Make ready, O Zebulon! / Adorn thyself, O Nephthali! / O River Jordan, leaping up, / receive thou the Master Who cometh to be Baptized! / Rejoice, O Adam, with our first mother! / Hide not yourselves as ye did before in paradise; / for He that beheld you naked hath appeared, / that He may clothe you in your primal raiment. // Christ hath appeared, desiring to make all creation new!

**Kontakion of the Sunday, Tone VI** — When Christ God, the Giver of Life, / raised all of the dead from the valleys of misery with His mighty hand, / He bestowed resurrection on the human race. / He is the Savior of all, the Resurrection, the Life, and the God of all.

**Kontakion of the hierarch, Tone IV "Having been lifted up"** — As a conversor with the ascetics, thou becamest a priest among the priests of God the King; wherefore, thou rejoicest now with the angelic choirs. O father Sylvester, thou God-bearing shepherd, dwelling in the heavens, save those who with love celebrate thy memory.

**Kontakion of St Seraphim of Sarov tone 2** - Having left the beauty of the world and what is corrupt in it, O Saint, / thou didst settle in Sarov Monastery. / And having lived there an angelic life, / thou wast for many the way to salvation. / Wherefore Christ has glorified thee, O Father Seraphim, / and has enriched thee with the gift of healing and miracles. / And so we cry to thee: / Rejoice, O Seraphim our righteous Father.

**Kontakion of the Forefeast, Tone IV, "Thou hast appeared today"** — In the streams of the Jordan the Lord crieth out to John today: / Fear not to baptize Me, // for I have come to save Adam the first-created!

### Matins Gospel IX

#### Epistle: II Timothy 4: 5-8

5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

### THERE IS LAID UP FOR ME THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS ...ALSO TO ALL THOSE WHO HAVE LOVED HIS APPEARING

Our Lord appeared personally to St. Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6). It made him a tireless slave in service to our Lord, having filled his heart with boundless love for Him. In us 'also who love His appearing' in the coming Theophany, may righteousness abound and may a crown of righteousness be laid up for us in heaven.

## Gospel: St. Mark 1: 1-8

1. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You." 3 "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.'" 4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. 5 And all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. 8 "I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

## Reflection

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you will be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My judgements and do them (Ezekiel 36:25).

## Saints of the week

**2 / 15 January — Sunday before Theophany - St Sylvester, Bishop of Rome** - Born in Rome, he was skilled from his early years in secular learning and in Christian doctrine, and his life was always governed by the precepts of the Gospel. He made good use of the tuition of a priest, Timothy, whose death for the Faith he witnessed, and, seeing the example of his teacher's self-sacrifice, nourished himself in that same spirit for the rest of his life. He became Bishop of Rome at the age of thirty, and reformed certain Christian customs; abolishing, for example, the Saturday fast that had up to that time been the rule among some Christians, and decreeing that only Great Saturday and those Saturdays that fall within fasting seasons should be so observed. By his prayers and miracles, he was instrumental in the conversion and baptism of the Emperor Constantine and his mother, Helena, and assisted Queen Helena in the finding of the Holy Cross. He governed the Church for twenty years, and, finishing with honour his earthly life, entered into the heavenly Kingdom in the year 335.

**Our Holy Father Seraphim of Sarov** - He was one of the greatest Russian ascetics and wonderworkers, with profound spiritual discernment. Born in 1759, he departed this life in 1833. He was distinguished by a great humility. When being praised by all the world, he referred to himself as "the poor wretch Seraphim"; St Theodota; Our Holy Father Ammon of Tabennisi; in Wales,

**St. Seiriol**. - (born c.494) (*Latin-Serialanus, English-Serial*) St. Seiriol the Fair was a younger brother of Kings Cynlas of Rhos and Einion of Lley. He entered the religious life and lived in a small hermitage on the Eastern Peninsula of Ynys Mon (Anglesey). His two ruling brothers later decided this humble residence was far too lowly for their Royal brother and founded an important monastery around his cell. Thus, Seiriol became the first Abbot of Penmon Priory. His hermitage and holy-well can still be seen there today. Seiriol became a great friend of St. Cybi who lived at Caer-Gybi on Ynys Cybi (Holy Island) on the far side of Ynys Mon (Anglesey). The two would often walk several miles to meet up for prayers at the Clorach Wells in Llandyfrydog in the centre of the island. This journey with his back to the sun allowed St. Seiriol's complexion to remain so fair that he was given the epithet of "Gwyn". In old age, Seiriol retired to Ynys Lannog (Priestholm), just off the coast from Penmon. It became known as Ynys Seiriol in his honour, though it is now better known as Puffin Island.

**3 / 16 January — The Prophet Malachi** - He was chronologically the last of the prophets, born after the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon in 538 B.C. He was unusually fair of face. According to folk-tradition, he was named 'the angel', perhaps because of his outward fairness, or because of his purity of spirit, or, again, perhaps, because of his companionship with an angel, with whom he often spoke face to face. At these times, others also heard its voice but were not worthy to look on its face. The young prophet spoke forth that which the angel revealed to him. He cried out against the ingratitude of Israel and the sins of the priests. Five hundred years before Christ, he clearly foretold the coming and work of St John the Baptist (3:7). But he was chiefly the prophet of the Day of Judgement (4:1-3). He went to God young in years, and after him there was no prophet in Israel until John the Baptist.

**The Holy Martyr Gordius** - born in Caesarea of Cappadocia, he was an officer in the Roman army under the Emperor Licinius. At the outbreak of a terrible persecution, he left the army and his former rank and went into the Sinai desert. Alone on Mount Horeb, Gordius spent his time in prayer and in pondering the mysteries of heaven and earth. In particular he pondered on vanity and on the worthlessness of all for which people struggle and strive so on earth. He came finally to the desire to die and so move into that life that is without transience or corruptibility. With this desire, he went down into a town where pagan games were held. He presented himself to the governor as a Christian. The governor attempted in vain to turn him from the Faith with flattery and threats. Gordius remained unyielding and firm as diamond, saying: "It would obviously be an act of the greatest folly to trade this brief life for eternal torment and spiritual peril." Condemned to death, he hastened joyfully to the place of execution, speaking with the executioners on the way of the wonderful and sweet knowledge of Christ. With the name of Christ on his lips, he delivered his youthful body to the sword and his righteous soul to God in the year 320. St Genevieve; in County Derry, St. Finlugh, abbot.

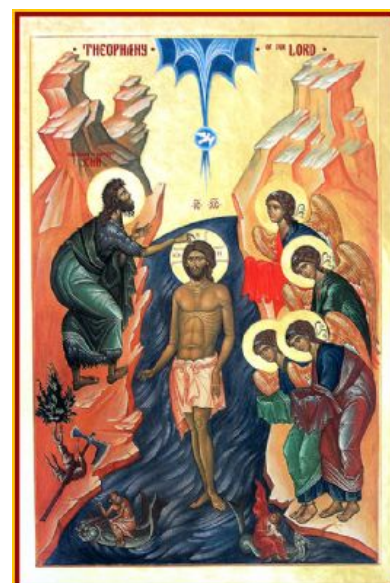
**4 / 17 January — The Synaxis of the Seventy Apostles** - In addition to the twelve Great Apostles, the Lord chose besides seventy other, lesser, apostles and sent them to preach to the Jews. He sent them out two by two before His face, to each town and place, saying: "Behold, I send you as sheep among wolves" (Lk. 10:1-5). But as Judas, one of the Twelve, fell away from the Lord, so some among these Seventy withdrew from Him, not with the intention of betraying Him but from human weakness and lack of faith (Jn. 6:66). And as Judas's place was filled from among the other apostles, so the places of these were filled with others chosen. These apostles laboured in the same way as the twelve Great Apostles; they were the assistants of the Twelve in the spreading and strengthening of the Church of God in the world. They suffered much torture and malice, from men and from demons, but their firm faith and burning love for the risen Lord made them conquerors of the world and heirs of the Kingdom of heaven. St Eustathius, Archbishop of Serbia - born in the diocese of Budim, of God-fearing parents, he became a monk as a young man in Zeta, then moved on to greater asceticism at Hilandar. In time he became abbot of Hilandar, was then chosen to be Bishop of Zeta and, after some time had elapsed, to be Archbishop of Serbia. He was a man of great virtue and led Christ's flock with zeal and love. He entered peacefully into rest at a great age in 1279, exclaiming as death drew near: 'Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.' His relics are preserved in the crypt of the church at Pec.

**The Eunuch of Queen Candace** - The Apostle Philip baptised this negro eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). After his baptism, the eunuch returned home and began to teach about Christ. He was the first apostle of the Faith among the negroes of Ethiopia. He died a martyr and was counted worthy of the Kingdom of God. Our Holy Father, the Martyr Onuphrius of Hilandar.

**5 / 18 January — Eve of Theophany — Fast Day - The Hieromartyr Theopemptus and the Holy Martyr Theonas** - when the Emperor Diocletian gave orders for the persecution of Christians, Theopemptus, Bishop of Nicomedia, was the first to suffer for Christ. He was brought before the Emperor, who threatened him with death if he did not deny Christ. To that threat, the courageous bishop replied: 'It is written: "Fear not those who are able to kill the soul". You, O King, have power over my body. Do with it whatever you will!' He was cruelly beaten and starved, and tortured in many ways. Finally the Emperor called in a magician, Theonas, to trick the man of God in some way with magic. Theonas dissolved a very strong poison in water and gave it to Theopemptus to drink. Theopemptus made the sign of the Cross over the cup and drank the poison. Theonas, seeing that it had no effect on Theopemptus, turned to the Emperor and cried out: 'I too am a Christian, and worship the Crucified!' They were both condemned to death; Theopemptus was slain with the sword and Theonas buried alive in the year 298. They suffered with honour and became citizens of the Kingdom of Christ.

**The Holy Prophet Micah the First (or Micaiah)** - Micah was a contemporary of the Prophet Elias (9th century B.C.), and prophesied evil to King Ahab, who was killed in battle against the Syrians (I Kings 22:8; II Chron. 18:7). He prophesied entirely orally, writing nothing down. There was another Micah, in the eighth century, who prophesied the birth of the Lord in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2) and wrote one of the prophetic books. Our **Holy Mother Syncletica** - a native of Macedonia and educated in Alexandria, she was a rich young woman of standing. She had many suitors, but refused them all and fled from her parents' home to a monastery. In the greatest self-denial, in vigils and prayer, she lived to the age of eighty. Her counsels to the nuns have always been regarded as true spiritual pearls, the wisdom she attained coming not from reading but through suffering and pain, through constant meditation and spiritual converse with the divine world. Her soul entered into that higher world in the year 350. Among other counsels, St Syncletica taught: 'Do not abandon a fast in time of sickness, for lo, those who do not fast fall into the same sicknesses.' Also: 'Treasure, when discovered, is quickly seized upon; so virtue, when it is made public, is quickly eclipsed and lost.' Our Holy Mother Apollinaria.

**6 / 19 January — The Theophany of Our Lord, God, & Saviour Jesus Christ (Baptism of the Lord)** — When the Lord Jesus had lived for thirty years from His birth in the flesh, He began His teaching and saving work. He marked this very beginning of the beginning by His Baptism in the Jordan. St Cyril of Jerusalem says: 'The beginning of the world—water; the beginning of the Gospel—the Jordan.' At the Baptism of the Lord in the water, that mystery was revealed to the world that was predicted in the Old Testament and fabled in ancient Egypt and India—the mystery of the Holy Trinity of God. The Father revealed Himself to the sense of hearing, the Spirit to the sense of sight and the Son, further beyond these, to the sense of touch. The Father gave His testimony of the Son, the Son was baptised in the waters and the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, hovered over the waters. And when John the Baptist bore witness of Christ and said: 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world' (Jn. 1:29), and when he immersed the Lord in the Jordan and baptised Him, there were thus revealed both the mission of Christ in the world and the path of our salvation. That is to say: Christ takes upon Himself the sin of the whole human race. He dies under it (the immersion) and rises again (the coming up out of the water), and we must die to the old, sinful man and rise again, cleansed, renewed and re-born. Here is the Saviour and here is the way of salvation. The Feast of the Theophany is also called the Illuminating, for in the Jordan there is given to us an illumining, revealing God to us as Trinity, consubstantial and undivided. That is one thing. And the other is that each of us baptised in the water is illumined by the Father of lights, through the merits of the Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit.



TODAY THE nature of the waters is sanctified. Today the Son of God is baptised in the waters of Jordan, having no need Himself of cleansing, but in order to cleanse the sinful human race from defilement. Now the heavens open and the voice of God the Father is heard: This is My beloved Son. The Holy Spirit descends upon the Saviour of the world, Who stands in the

Jordan, thereby confirming that this indeed is He Who is the incarnate Son of God. The Holy Trinity is clearly made manifest and is revealed to mankind. The waters of the Jordan are sanctified, and together with them all the waters of creation, the very nature of water. Water is given power to cleanse not only the body, but also man's whole soul, and to regenerate the whole man unto a new life through Baptism. Through water all of nature is cleansed, for out of water the world was made, and moisture penetrates everywhere, giving life to everything else in nature. Without moisture neither animals nor plants can live; moisture penetrates into rocks, into every place in the world. The waters are sanctified and through them the whole world, in preparation for renewal and regeneration for God's eternal Kingdom which is to come.

Every year on this day the glory of God is revealed, renewing and confirming what was accomplished at Christ's Baptism. Again the heavens are opened; again the Holy Spirit descends. We do not see this with our bodily eyes, but we sense its power. At the rite of blessing, the waters which are thereby sanctified are transformed; they become incorruptible and retain their freshness for many years. Everyone can see this—both believers and unbelievers, both the wise and the ignorant. Whence do the waters acquire this property? It is the action of the Holy Spirit.

Those who with faith drink these waters and anoint themselves with them receive relief and healing from spiritual and bodily infirmities. Homes are sanctified by these waters, the power of demons is expelled, God's blessing is brought down upon all that is sprinkled with these waters. Through the sanctifying of the waters God's blessing is again imparted to the whole world, cleansing it from the sins we have committed and guarding it from the machinations of the devil.

Today the Holy Spirit, descending upon the waters when the Cross of Christ is immersed into them, descends upon all of nature. Only into man He cannot enter without his will. Let us open our hearts and souls to receive Him and with faith cry from the depth of our souls: "Great art Thou, O Lord, and marvellous are Thy works, and there is no word which sufficeth to hymn Thy wonders."

*Man of God, St. John of Shanghai & San Francisco, p.163*

**7 / 20 January — Afterfeast of Theophany - Fast Day — Synaxis for the Holy, Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist, John** — John's greatest role during his life was enacted on the day of the Theophany, and because of this the Church has, from the earliest times, dedicated the day following that feast to his memory. This day is also connected with an event involving the hand of the Forerunner. The Evangelist Luke desired to take John's body from Sebaste, where the great prophet had been beheaded by Herod, to Antioch, his own birthplace. He succeeded, though, in acquiring and taking only one hand, which was kept in Antioch till the tenth century. It was then moved to Constantinople, whence it disappeared during the Turkish occupation. (It is related that each year, on his feast-day, the archbishop would bring it out before the people. Sometimes the hand appeared open, and sometimes clenched. In the first case it indicated that it would be a fertile year, and in the second that it would be a year of famine.) St John is commemorated several times during the year, but his greatest feast is on this day, January 7th. Among the Gospel-figures surrounding the Saviour, the person of John the Baptist holds a very special place, by the manner of his birth in this world and of his earthly life, by his role of baptiser of men to repentance and his baptism of the Messiah, and, lastly, by the tragic manner of his departure from this world. He was of such moral purity that he indeed deserved the name 'angel', as he was named in the Scriptures, rather than being thought of as just a mortal man. John differs from all the other prophets in that he had the joy of showing forth to the world the One Whom he had foretold.

Tropar of St. John the Baptist (Tone 2): The memory of the just is praised, but thou art well pleased, O Forerunner, with the testimony of the Lord. For thou hast verily been shown forth as more honoured than the prophets, since thou wast counted worthy to baptise in the stream Him whom they foretold. Therefore, having mightily contended and suffered for the truth, with joy thou hast preached also to those in hell the good tidings of God made manifest in the flesh, who takes away the sin of the world and grants us great mercy. The Holy Martyr Athanasius; St. Cedd of Lastingham, bishop of the East Saxons (664); St. Brannoch (Brynach) of Braunton (6th c).

**8 / 21 January — Afterfeast of Theophany -The Holy Martyrs Julian and Vasilissa** - They were both of rich and noble families and, though married, agreed to live in celibacy as brother and sister. They gave their goods to the poor and embraced the monastic state; Julian founding a men's monastery of about 10,000 monks and Vasilissa one for about a thousand nuns. When a violent persecution of Christians was launched under Diocletian, Vasilissa besought God that none of her nuns should suffer torture nor repudiate the Orthodox faith. The Lord hearkened to the petition of His worthy servant and, during the next six months, took all the nuns to Himself, one by one, and finally their abbess Vasilissa. Before her own death, Vasilissa had a vision of her sisters in the other world. They were all bathed in light and were rejoicing like the angels. They appealed to their spiritual mother to join them as quickly as possible. Julian's monastery was burned by fire, and Julian was inhumanly tortured, being killed only after the most horrible sufferings. The Lord inspired and strengthened him in his torments and he endured them with heroism, keeping faith and glorifying the name of Christ. Together with Julian were beheaded the son and wife of the persecutor Marcian, Celsus and Maronilla, who, seeing Julian's heroic and patient sufferings, were themselves converted to Christianity. Also martyred with him were twenty Roman soldiers, seven brothers from that locality, a priest named Antony and a man called Anastasius whom Julian, at the time of his own martyrdom, raised from the dead by his prayers. They all suffered with honour for Christ and became citizens of the Kingdom of heaven in about the year 313. Our Holy Father George the Chozebite; St Domnica; St Gregory, Bishop of Ochrid; Holy Virgin Gudula of Brussels (659).