



THEOPHANY

Water is critical for sustaining life; it permeates all of creation, from the vast oceans to the cells in our bodies. Water is also significant in Orthodox theology and liturgical practice.

When Jesus was about thirty years old, He went to His cousin John the Baptist to be baptized in the waters of the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). The heavens were opened, the Spirit descended in the form of a dove upon Jesus and the voice from heaven declared that this was the beloved Son of God, now baptized as a man. From these events the divinity of Jesus Christ and the great mystery of the Trinity were demonstrated. Theophany is the divine manifestation: God's appearance to humanity and the meeting of heaven and earth in the fully unified human and divine natures of Jesus Christ. We celebrate Theophany on January 6.

APOLYTIKION

Lord, when You were baptized in the Jordan, the veneration of the Trinity was revealed. For the voice of the Father gave witness to You, calling You Beloved, and the Spirit, in the guise of a dove, confirmed the certainty of His words. Glory to You, Christ our God, who appeared and enlightened the world.

WISDOM, ANCIENT AND MODERN

It is never too late. God's world has incredible healing powers; and human choices can change the tide in global warming. Within a single generation, we could steer earth toward our children's future. With God's blessing and help, that generation can begin now.

— *His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*

The earth is the Lord's, and its fullness, the world and all who dwell therein. For He founded it upon the seas and prepared it upon the rivers.

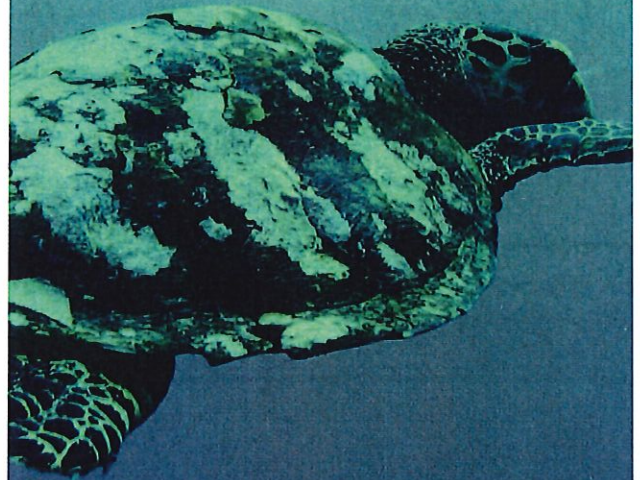
— *Psalm 23(24):1-2*

According to the great Fathers of the Church, man is the prince of creation endowed with the privilege of freedom. Being simultaneously a partaker of the material and the spiritual world, he was created in order to refer creation back to the Creator so that the world may be saved from decay and death.

— *His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios*
September 1, 1989

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

— *Colossians 1:16-17*



Family Connection

THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S

HIEROMONK MICHAEL (ZIEBARTH)

"If I ascend into heaven, You would be there; If I should descend into Hades, You would be there; If I should take up my wings at dawn and pitch camp at the furthest part of the sea, even there Your hand would lead me, and Your right hand would hold me."

— Psalm 138 (139):8–10

God is beyond all creation, the Creator of all; yet none of creation is beyond God. God is present in all things, the very being or existence of all things. Without God, apart from God, no thing could exist. God gives order to all things: "in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

All things teach us and lead us to God. All things around us are droplets of the love of God—things animate and inanimate, the plants and the animals, the birds and the mountains, the sea and the sunset and the starry sky. They are little loves through which we attain to the great Love that is Christ. Flowers, for example, have their own grace: they teach us with their fragrance, and with their magnificence. They speak to us of the love of God.

(Wounded by Love: The Life and Wisdom of Elder Porphyrios)

Yes, physical things, created and blessed by God, are the means by which God's grace comes to us. We may not always be aware of or conscious of that grace, but that does



not mean that God is not present and working. They are, in a sense, sacraments—mysterious means by which physical things and actions convey God's grace to our daily lives and experiences. When all creation is luminous with the light of Mount Tabor, then every tree, every birdsong, every stream and every drop of water is a mystery of sacramental grace. In baptism, water is a well-known vehicle of grace. We would not say that the water itself sanctifies; but, with the grace of God in it invoked by our prayers, the water indeed sanctifies. We must, however, start with clean, pure water. To foul the water would be an affront to the sacrament. The same is true with the blessing of Holy Water, which is blessed at least every January 6 at Theophany and with which we bless our lives, homes and world.

The bread of the Eucharist is consecrated to be for us the body of Christ, feeding us with God's grace. "Holy Gifts for the holy people of God." Nobody would think of choosing moldy bread for the Eucharist! The chalice to be blessed is filled with pure, sweet wine and pure, clean water. To use polluted water and wine is obviously a sin against the sacramental action of grace.

All of creation similarly offers us daily, and hourly, the presence and grace of God, if we can become aware of and appreciate it. When I pollute God's gift in any way I am rejecting His sacramental gift of grace. Let us, each day, do all we can to become aware of God's blessing in this world that He has given us and protect that blessed offering of His grace.

God the *Logos* is at the root of the *logos* of each created thing, each action. Until we start to become truly and experientially aware of the radiance of God permeating, saturating and illuminating each thing and action, we just muddle along as best we can. We can try to be economical, to be good stewards of creation and its resources. It is a moral responsibility. It is humanly reasonable. This is good; it is usually hard work as well. His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has said: "If human beings were to treat one another's personal property the way they treat the natural environment, we would view that behavior as anti-social and illegal. We would expect legal sanctions and even compensation. When will we learn that to commit a crime against the natural world is also a sin?" But as we grow in the experience of the *sacramental mystery of life*, then what starts as effort becomes actually spontaneous. Nobody has to tell me or require me to value and care for one that I

love. "Obedience is then spontaneous flow in Love," as St. Porphyrios used to say.

Thirty years ago Patriarch Dimitrios established September 1, the start of the ecclesial New Year, as also a day for prayer and blessing of our environment. Perhaps the local parish can use this special day of new beginnings as a springboard for more intentional, collective care of its resources.

How, notably, can we as individuals and communities treasure God's wonder-filled gift of sacramental grace in creation? First: don't waste. One example can be seen at St. Gregory Palamas Monastery in Ohio where all the new construction for the last ten years has been super insulated and older buildings are being upgraded and weatherized. This pays off in immediately reduced utility bills. Weatherizing and switching simply toward LED lighting has already provided similar savings to the metropolis center in Pittsburgh. Energy that we don't squander is energy that need not be generated. Energy not generated means pollutants that are not emitted.

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Refraining from using common single-use plastics requires some attention and creativity. It can be a real asceticism. Plastics are wonderful materials for long-term purposes—they last nearly forever. They allow medical treatments that can greatly extend life and well-being. But single-use plastic makes up nearly 50 percent of all plastic use. It clogs waterways and solid waste disposal, kills wildlife and leaches endocrine disruptors and other poisons into the water, land and air. Single-use plastic only appears cheap because most of the costs occur after the item is thrown away and thus are ignored. A reusable bag for groceries, a reusable water bottle and less packaging all help in tiny increments that could make a huge collective difference. And if we don't demand the throwaway plastics there will be no market, no profit in producing them. Thus, there will be no support for

their polluting and destructive extraction and manufacture. Other materials will become economical and profitable, almost spontaneously.

Electricity is a very useful form of energy. Today in America it is almost all produced in large centralized generation stations (driven by some form of fossil fuel except in the case of hydroelectric dams) and transmitted over long distances over a highly complicated grid. That system is very convenient while it works and very inconvenient when its vulnerabilities produce widespread outages. Distributed generation is use of energy produced locally, for example with solar systems, and it is rapidly becoming economically viable. Present utilities and government policies in America resist distributed generation, profiting by maintaining a centralized, subsidized monopoly on electricity. Still, both individuals and communities are adopting the technology. In most areas in America there are metering systems mandated that allow individual solar generation to be linked to the existing grid system and moderate the utility costs.

One of the greatest blessings of having even some local power generation, such as solar power, is that it spontaneously inspires conservation. We become aware of our energy consumption and that consumption spontaneously is reduced. Mount Athos is reputed to be the largest off-grid community in the world. Docheariou and Xenophontos monasteries have major solar arrays that provide all their electricity and there are individual solar systems throughout the sketes and kellia. A quick look at Google Maps will confirm this. Monasteries don't tend to be wasteful, or they don't survive long. It has been said that angels are a light to monks and monks a light to people in the world.

Elder Paisios often used to tell me how, when God visits the heart, man becomes so subtle and gentle in his relation to nature, that he no longer disturbs it, nor needs to protect himself: he does not tread on flowers or nettles, kill ants, or brush off flies, but he shows respect for the broken twig, the fruitless tree, the annoying insect, the aggressive animal. When you come across a wild animal or a snake, if you love it in this way it will not harm you: for it loves you also. You become a friend of nature, and all creation returns the love and trust. You show respect for it in its sighing and in its weakness, you water it with

prayer and it responds by producing marvelous fruits. The harvest you reap is not the result of the laws of cause and effect, but is a form of the divine blessing. In this way the environment is transformed into a holy place and natural laws are replaced by miracles and acts of divine intervention. This is ascetic ecology.

(Mount Athos: The Highest Place on Earth, Metropolitan Nikolaos Hatzinikolaou)

Through each of us, all creation praises God. Each Christian has, in a sense, a priestly vocation. The key to being, in our small way, the priest of all creation is a heart that embraces all creatures in God's love. We work with what we have. Sometimes the bread for the offering is less than perfect. Sometimes the wine is not so sweet. Sometimes my soul is less than prepared. Sometimes the only coffee cup available is Styrofoam. We work with what we have and aim for better. This world is a gift from God. It is the vehicle of God's grace and blessing to us and what we have to offer back in worship and praise and thanks to Him. God will not smile if we trash His gift. When we master that, then we plant trees and the work of restoration begins.

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HONORING GOD'S CREATION EVERY DAY OF THE WEEK

MELANIE DISTEFANO

The first instance of pollution was arguably when Eve partook of the “forbidden fruit” in the Garden of Eden. With this initial disobedience of God’s commandment, humanity polluted a pure and undefiled environment with sin. Before this, all creation existed in perfect harmony. After it, enmity, fear, pain and decay ensued for every living thing. We are intricately connected to everything in our environment—the saints coined the human being as a “microcosm,” a “little world.” This is true whether we are conscious of it or not. The problem is that we too often are not.

Our modern way of life lends itself to increasing disregard for the goodness of God’s gifts, which we have been entrusted with by our Creator to use appropriately. This is especially true in industrialized nations where resources are plentiful and the distance between those who produce and those who consume is often so great that consumers underestimate their precious value. We tend to think that there will always be more of whatever we want, and that someone else will take care of the excessive waste we generate.

Better stewardship begins in our own households when we cultivate gratitude and respect for all of God’s handiwork. Revisiting the creation narratives in the book of Genesis helps us do just that. In them we learn that everything God created is good, orderly and purposeful and is born of His power and love.

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DAY 1

WATER, EARTH AND LIGHT

Read: Genesis 1:1–5

Notice how the basic elements that make up the world were all made on the first day of creation but weren’t in their assigned places yet. The light referenced here is not sunlight, but rather it is believed to be fire.

Children can retrieve a cup of dirt from their yard, add two cups of water and then stir it together with their hands in a glass bowl. Upon reading the words, “Let there be light,” one person can light a match. Encourage all to share their thoughts on how through these basic elements God shaped the entire universe and all the creatures that dwell therein.

Challenge your family to use less water. Turn off faucets while brushing teeth. See who can take the shortest shower—without sacrificing good hygiene, of course!

DAY 2

THE SKY

Read: Genesis 1:6–8

Go outside and observe the sky. Is it sunny or cloudy? Talk about the air and how it's meant to be clean for our lungs to breathe in life-sustaining oxygen. Smog from burning fossil fuels changes the atmosphere and contributes to dreary, stifling weather conditions.

Reducing our fossil fuel use improves air quality. Carpool or use public transportation if possible. Avoid using harsh cleaning chemicals or aerosols for self-care products. Turn off lights, TVs and electrical appliances when not in use. This can become part of daily chores, rotating responsibility for turning things off among family members.

DAY 3

FORMING OF EARTH, SEAS AND PLANT LIFE

Read: Genesis 1:9–13

Arguments for genetically modified food crops seem reasonable: the more food we can produce, the more people can be fed. Genetically modified plants (also called genetically modified organisms, or GMOs) resist insect damage and withstand pesticides that abound in American agricultural practice. However, nutritional content of genetically modified plants pales compared to those grown without chemicals and artificial fertilizers. Moreover, an ethical question arises: Is it abusing our authority over creation to alter the genetic design of any life?

Plants are natural air purifiers. Keep a few houseplants, letting children water them with unfinished drinks from mealtime. A small vegetable garden planted using non-GMO seeds will cultivate healthy fruits and vegetables and also a greater appreciation for food. We are less apt to waste the tomato we have nurtured from a seedling than the one bought at a store: our efforts allowed for its growth. Teach children to always thank God for their food, asking Him to bless it for strength of body and soul.

DAY 4

SUN, MOON AND STARS

Read: Genesis 1:14–18

When you look at the sky and the beauty of the stars, throw yourself at God's feet and adore Him who in His wisdom has arranged things in this way.

— St. Basil the Great, from Homily V. *In martyrem Julittam*

Light pollution from vehicles, streetlights and skyscrapers masks the atmosphere, robbing the heavens of their glory. The convenience of electricity has provided many life-giving opportunities for our world. It allows us to be “productive” any time of day or night. However, our bodies are suffering the consequences of not following natural rhythms.

Consider turning off lights at night and lighting candles instead. Reduce your blue light exposure from electronics. For better sleep, experts suggest shutting down devices two hours before bed as blue light excites brain activity. Less time watching TV, using devices or playing Fortnite can be replaced by more stargazing, reading, conversing and praying.



DAY 5**BIRDS AND FISH***Read: Genesis 1:20–23*

Learn about the birds that are natural to your region and do some bird watching. Children can try to identify different types by their colors and calls. Watch the birds' behavior as they build nests and gather food.

Plastic disposal is very harmful to our world's water creatures: bags, bottles and straws are all serious threats. Beached whales have been autopsied to find that plastic grocery bags caused damage to digestive organs. Consider buying reusable grocery sacs for shopping trips. Recycle plastic bags at your grocery store. Invest in water filters instead of buying bottled water for your family.

DAY 6**INSECTS, LAND ANIMALS
AND HUMAN BEINGS***Read: Genesis 1:24–31*

After all creatures were made with increasing complexity, God created the "crown" of His Creation—human beings. With a singular will, the Holy Trinity formed mankind: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). He gave humans dominion over creation based on this likeness. This authority is intended to be careful and generous—not sloppy, wasteful and selfish.

Most people can reap physical and spiritual benefits by reducing animal product intake. Start with the Church's prescription to abstain from animal products on Wednesdays and Fridays, and then cut servings on other days. Over-consumption is taxing to our digestive systems and our industrial farming

systems, pressuring farmers into unhealthy management of livestock to supply our demand.

DAY 7**THE SABBATH REST***Read: Genesis 2:1–3*

On Sunday we rest from the frenzy of activities that satiate our weekly calendars, laying aside "every worldly care." We do the "one thing needful" and attend Divine Liturgy to hear God's Word and worship Him with gratitude. We rest assured, knowing that in the Eucharist we are joined to Christ and all of creation becomes renewed.

Christ united the body of the Church with heaven and with earth: with angels, men and all created things ... with the animals and birds, with each tiny wild flower and each microscopic insect. The Church thus became "the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:23) ... Everything is in Christ and with Christ. This is the mystery of the Church.

— St. Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia

"Everything is in Christ and with Christ"—the more deeply we believe this, the more we will honor God's creation, every day of the week.

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