



ADVENT





And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God into the city of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.



Having come in, the angel said to her, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS..." Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."



"Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible."

Then Mary said, "Behold the maid servant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

[Luke 1:28–38]



*Mary's visit to
Elizabeth - The
Visitation.
Luke 1:39-56*

In those days
Mary arose and
went with haste into
the hill country, to a
city of Judah, and
she entered the
house of Zechariah
and greeted
Elizabeth.



And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever." And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home.







In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiber'i-us Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturae'a and Trachoni'tis, and Lysa'hi-as tetrarch of Abile'ne, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Ca'iaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechari'ah in the wilderness; and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

ADVENT, CHRISTMAS, AND EPIPHANY



*O come, O Rod of Jesse's stem,
From every foe deliver them
That trust your mighty power to save,
And give them victory o'er the grave.*

- Each Advent we are called to prepare ourselves, as we realize that we are one year further away from our baptism and one year closer to judgment.
- Since the Final Judgment will reveal Christ's complete victory over the powers of sin and death, we must prepare ourselves so that we may share that victory with Him. Christ is to be welcomed as our Saviour and King at Christmas.
- Advent is also a season that teaches us the value of waiting and patience. We are not called to passive waiting, but to using our time to prepare and anticipate. Just as we take time to prepare the nursery for a new baby, we should prepare our hearts during the Advent season to welcome Jesus Christ.



The Advent Wreath

The circle of the wreath and the evergreens that make it up both signify God's endless mercy and undying love. Three purple candles and one rose-coloured (pink) candle are evenly spaced around the wreath. There is one larger white candle in the centre of the wreath. The wreath can be as simple as four candle holders with greenery laid around them to form a circle. However, some traditions attach meanings to using different greens, each signifying another aspect of the season.



Ivy—to remind us of the human spirit clinging to God's strength.

Cedar—to remind us of eternal life available to all through Christ.

Holly—to remind us of Jesus' crown of thorns.

Bay—to remind us of victory over sin and death.



Each week, an additional candle is lit. As the light grows brighter, we are reminded that the Light of the World will soon arrive in glory. The central white candle is to be larger (often thicker) than the four in the wreath. This relatively recent addition to the Advent wreath signifies the Light of Christ and is first lit on Christmas Eve and relit burned on Christmas Day.



A Jesse Tree

The 11th chapter of Isaiah describes the ideal king in the line of Israel's great king, David.

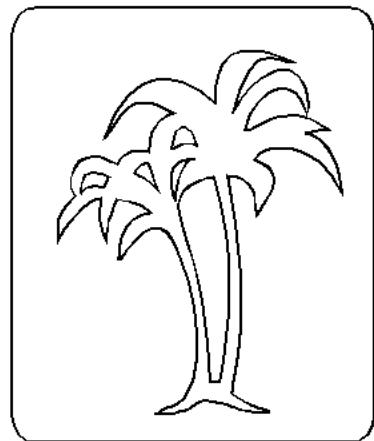
The first verse of that chapter says,

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,

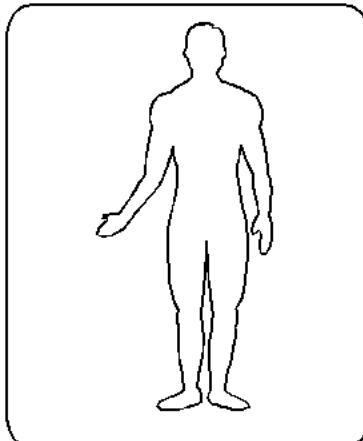
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

Jesse was King David's father. The image of a branch growing out of the roots of Jesse points to a new king in David's line. Christians know that this is fulfilled in Jesus, the King of Kings, who is a descendent of Jesse. One tradition is to decorate a tree branch with symbols that remember other important persons from the Old Testament. The symbols on the "Jesse Tree" remind us that our belief grows out of deep roots of thousands of years of ancestors in the faith.

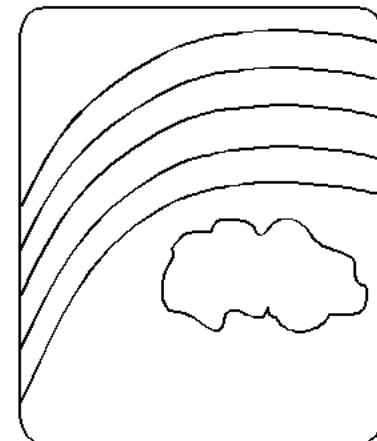




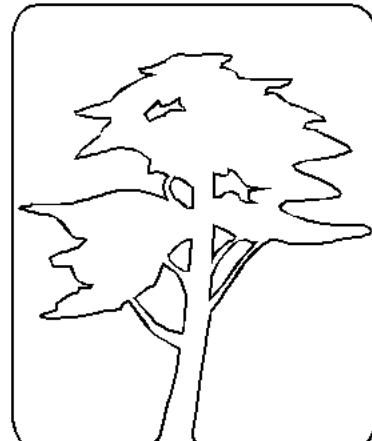
Deborah



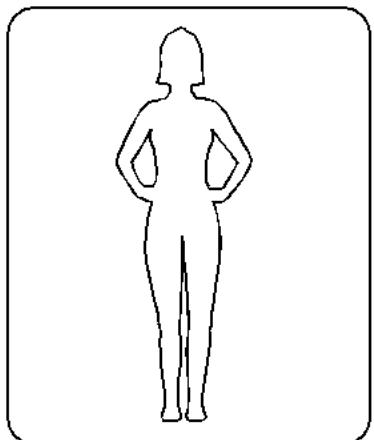
Adam



Noah



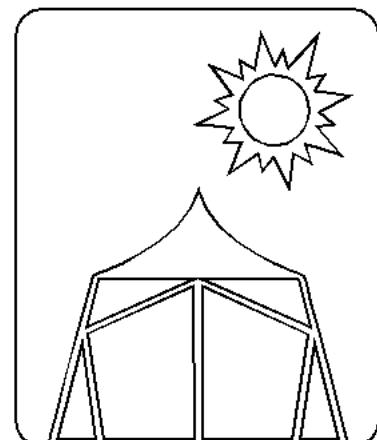
Abraham



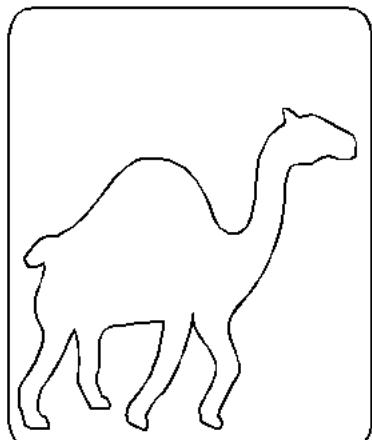
Eve



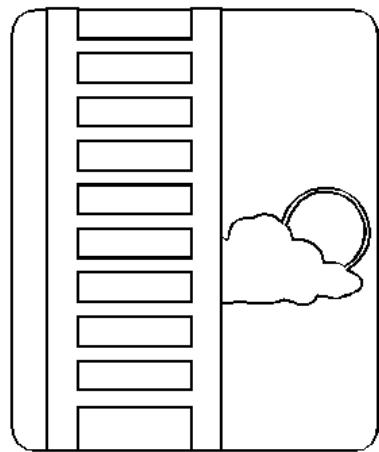
Mary



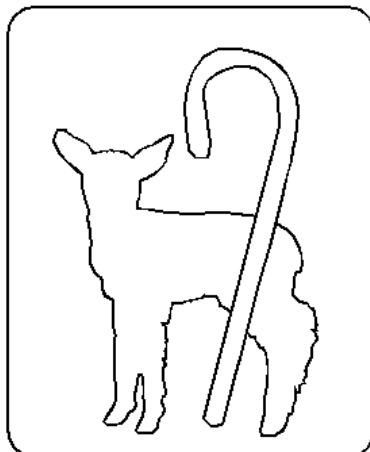
Sarah



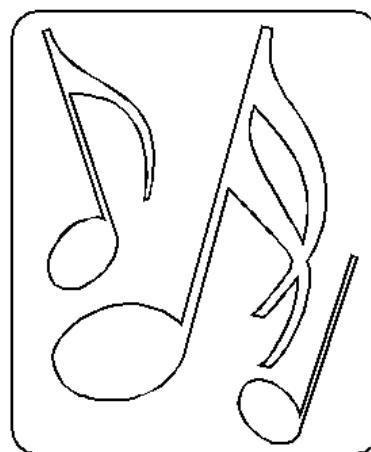
Rebekah



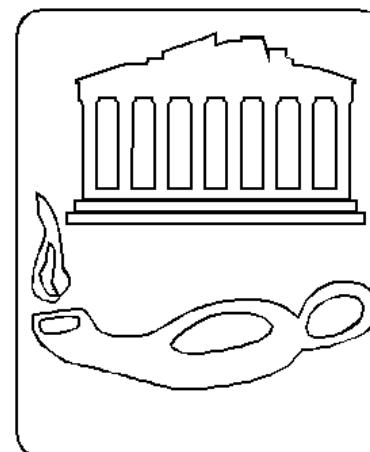
Jacob



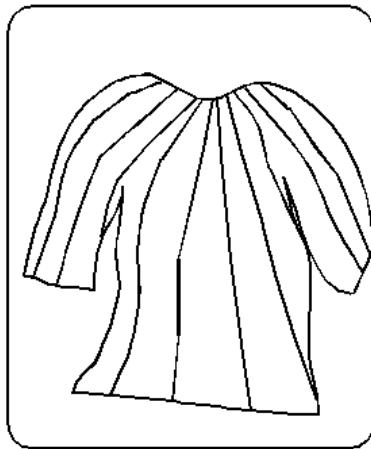
Rachel



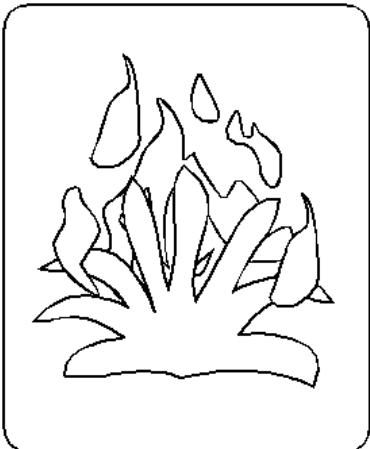
Miriam



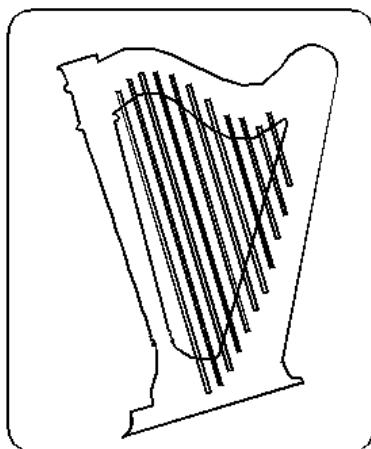
Samuel



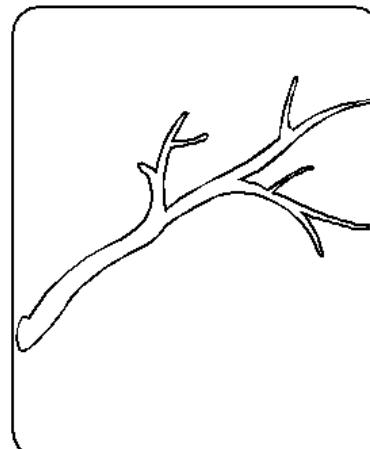
Joseph



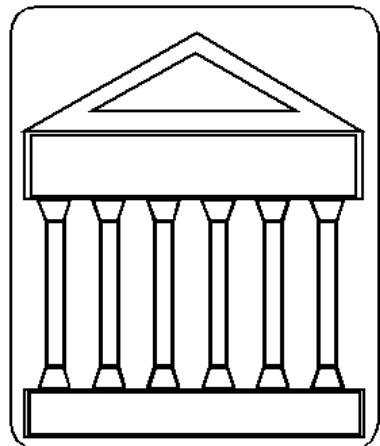
Moses



David



Jesse



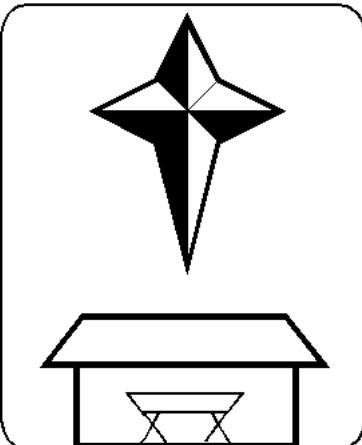
Solomon



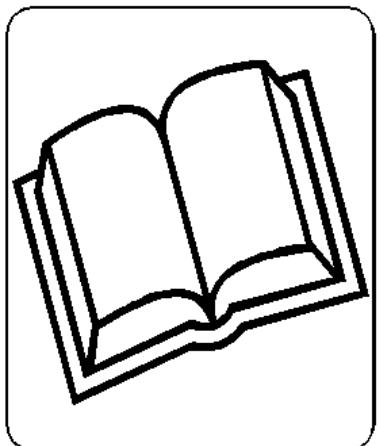
Hezekiah



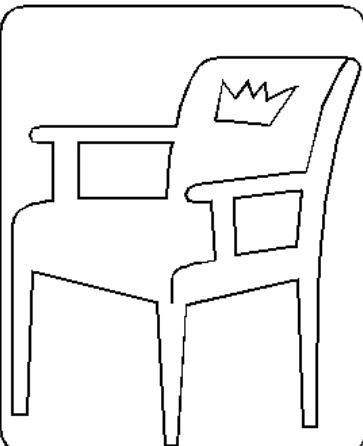
John the Baptist



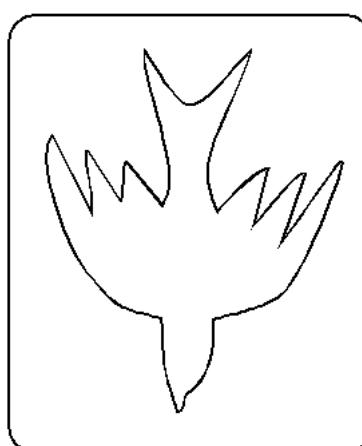
Jesus



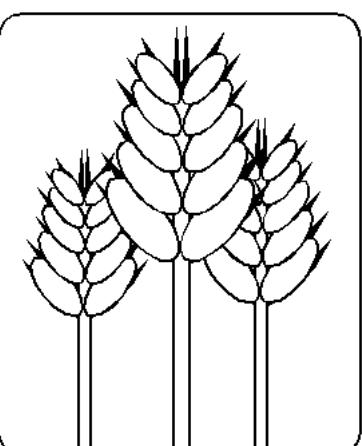
Josiah



Isaiah



Elizabeth



Ruth



And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered...So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.



So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

[Luke 2:1–7]

Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem

Church of the Nativity is the oldest church in the Holy Land still in use, commemorating the birthplace of Jesus Christ.

Since St. Helena is believed to have built the Church of the Nativity, there are others who believe that it was the Emperor Constantine who ordered the construction of monumental churches to honour the three principal events of Jesus' life.





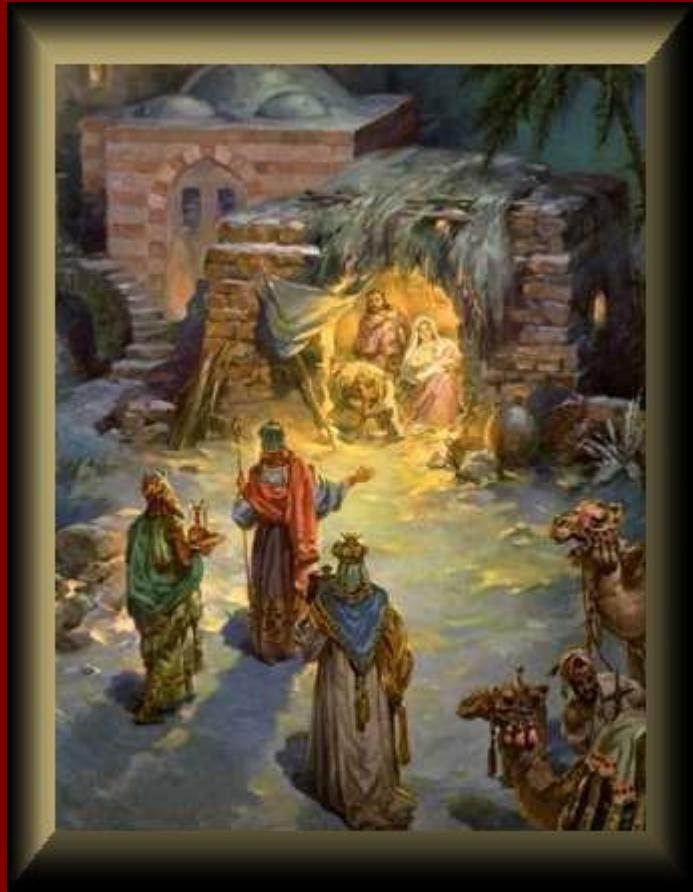
Two flights of steps from two sides lead down to the Grotto and meet at the Altar of the Nativity, the site where Jesus is said to have been born. The floor beneath the Alter is encased in white marble, where, fitted into the paving, shines a 14 pointed silver star marking the exact spot surrounded by the Latin inscription: HIC DE VIRGINE MARIA JESUS CHRISTUS NATUS EST . 1717 . (Here Jesus Christ was born to the Virgin Mary).



Christmas is the splendid culmination of the preparations of Advent. Christmas, literally "Christ's Mass," is the season celebrating the Incarnation and is centred around the Nativity of our Lord on December 25, commonly called Christmas Day. Gifts are associated with this festival reflecting the offerings of the Wise Men to the Infant Saviour.



The Christmas season lasts for twelve days. It would seem that after the serious preparation of Advent that we would want to extend this festival, but all too often, we diminish it by only keeping Christmas on December 25th. If we keep a holy Advent, Christmas is a fulfilment and a time for rejoicing, not an anticlimax.



Epiphany, 6 January, is the feast day which ends the Christmas season. Epiphany means a "manifestation or showing forth." On the Feast of the Epiphany, we remember the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, the Wise Men who had travelled from the East in search of Him.

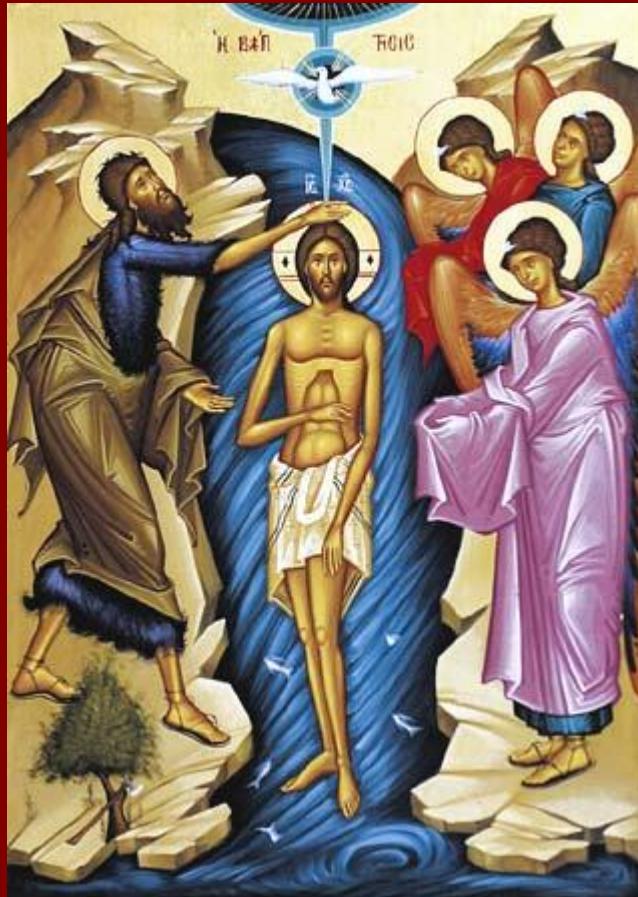


Traditionally in the western Church, this is considered one of the three manifestations of Christ, the others being at the wedding at Cana and the Transfiguration.



Feast of the Holy Theophany of our lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ

January 6 in the Greek and Russian Orthodox Church



The Feast of the Holy Theophany (Epiphany) of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ is celebrated each year on January 6. The Feast commemorates the Baptism of Christ and the divine revelation of the Holy Trinity. At the Baptism of Christ, all three Persons of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—were made manifest. Thus, the name of the Feast is Epiphany, meaning manifestation, or Theophany, meaning manifestation of God.

Icon of the feast

The Icon of the Feast of Theophany tells the story from the Gospels in images and colour. On the left side of the icon we see John the Baptist who is dressed in camel's hair and has the appearance of one who lives in the wilderness. His arms are outstretched, showing an attitude of prayer and reverence, but also directing others to Christ. With his right hand he is conducting the baptism.



1. Saint John the Baptist conducts the Baptism of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (detail).



2. The Heavens open, the voice of the Father is heard, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descends upon Christ (detail).

In the centre of the icon is Christ being baptized in the Jordan. He is standing in the water wearing a waistcloth, and with His right hand He is blessing the waters of the Jordan. Above His head is the Holy Spirit descending as a dove upon Him. At the top of the icon, a semicircle depicts the opening of the Heavens and the voice of the Father.



3. Angels of the Lord gathered on the shore of the Jordan River give praises to Christ (detail).



4. An angel of the Lord receives Christ as He comes out of the water (detail).

On the right side of the icon angels are shown with their heads bowed in reverence to Christ . They are prepared to receive Him as He comes out of the water



Christ's baptism in the Jordan was "theophany," a manifestation of God to the world, because it was the beginning of our Lord's public ministry. It was also a "theophany" in that the world was granted a revelation of the Holy Trinity. All three Persons were made manifest together: the Father testified from on high to the divine Sonship of Jesus; the Son received His Father's testimony; and the Spirit was seen in the form of a dove, descending from the Father and resting upon the Son.



