

me Who is mightier than I, the strap of Whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.”

- **Humble recognition of the preeminence of Christ**—“I am not the Christ, but, I have been sent ahead of Him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:28-30)

John was a great example but Jesus Himself is the greatest example of humility, and if Christ lives in us then we will be like Him, we will have the same mind as Christ “Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

But **humility only remains** when there is a **continual attitude** of repentance and a **continual thankfulness** for God’s unconditional forgiveness and salvation. The love of God only abides in the humble and thankful heart—Jesus only abides in the humble and thankful heart.

Conclusion:

As Isaiah prophesied and as John the Baptist fulfilled, hear again these words: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” Jesus only comes into the life that is cleansed by repentance and baptism and He remains in that life only in a continual atmosphere of humility. Our house is cleaned, Jesus has come, now like Mary humbly sit at His feet and hear His words of love. *Amen!*



Preparing the Way for Jesus

“We need to recognize where the dirt is, let God wash it away, and then enjoy the clean house, ready for Christ to enter in.”

Homily given at All Saints Orthodox Church
on the Sunday Before the Theophany, 2009
by Fr. Nicholas Sorensen

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, “Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, “After me comes He Who is mightier than I, the strap of Whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:1–8)

Introduction

Christ Jesus is Born. He has come into our world. What does it take for Him to come into our lives too? Many times I have said that the goal of Orthodox Christianity is a personal relationship with Christ. This is said in different ways. Seriphim of Sarov said that “the true aim of our Christian life consists of the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God.”

St. Paul speaks of “putting on Christ” and “having the mind of Christ” and “Christ lives in me.”

But how does all of this happen?

We must first *prepare* our lives for the Christ to enter in. As Isaiah said, “Make his paths straight.” I remember my mother saying to me as a boy: “Straighten up!” What she was telling me was “Stop acting like a fool, and start being obedient!” And this straightening up—this preparation for Jesus to enter into our lives is what Repentance and Baptism are all about.

Once we have straightened up, then we need to *preserve* our new life by growing in humility and in the knowledge of our Lord. As St. Paul put it, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead .” (Phil 3:10)

I. The Good News of Jesus Christ Begins with Proper Preparation for Christ to Enter In

Preparation for someone to enter into our house always begins with a thorough house cleaning. And so it is, when we want Christ to

enter into our lives. We need to recognize where the dirt is, let God wash it away, and then enjoy the clean house, ready for Christ to enter in.

First, there is repentance, then baptism—new birth—new life in Christ, and finally, the wonderful and amazing forgiveness of God. **John’s baptism** brought the forgiveness of sins, but *the Baptism into Christ* not only brings forgiveness of sins but also new and eternal life. Listen to what the New Testament says about Christian baptism:

- **St. Peter** during his great Pentecost sermon said to the gathered crowd: “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38).
- **St. Peter** also wrote these words: “baptism now saves you.” (1 Pet. 3:21)
- **Jesus Himself** speaking to Nicodemus said: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (John 3:3–5)
- **St. Paul** again wrote: “Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (Rom 6:4)

Repentance, baptism, and finally the wonderful joy and peace of knowing that we are forgiven—this is the proper preparation for Jesus to come into our lives. And if you want Him, come He will—and does!

II. To Preserve Our New Life in Christ We Need Humility

But then what? Are we born into this new life, only to die of neglect? Jesus has come into our home, now do we want Him to leave? If we want Him as a permanent guest, we must cultivate humility and learn from Him by listening to Him and following Him.

John the Baptist is an excellent example of this humility:

- **Humble clothing**—camel hair and leather girdle.
- **Humble diet**—locusts and wild honey.
- **Humble evaluation of himself**—“One Who comes after