

## Psalm 99

*A Psalm of David for thanksgiving*

1. Acclaim God joyfully, all the earth.
2. Attend unto the Lord with gladness.  
Come before Him with exultation.
3. Know that the Lord, He is our God.

It is He that has made us, and not we ourselves.  
We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.

4. Enter through His gates in acknowledgement,  
and into His courts with hymns.  
Thank Him, and praise His name.
5. For the Lord is gracious, His mercy is forever,  
and His truth is for all generations.

This psalm is of the thirteenth Kathisma and is not used in our Liturgy or sacraments except when its turn comes to be read in the weekly cycle.

We seldom think to make psalms a feature of our personal daily prayers. Nevertheless, they are an inseparable part of the corporate prayer of our worship services. This particular psalm is a short hymn of praise and thanksgiving, suitable for our use as a daily prayer. Try praying it.

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## SAINT SOPHIA GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL

Ἁγίας Σοφίας τοῦ Θεοῦ

Washington, D.C.

January 10, 2010

The Sunday Following Theophany

The Tone for this day is Plagal 2

The Morning Gospel of the Orthros is No. 9

John 20:19-31

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup>When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld." Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

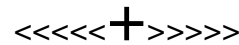
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**The Epistle Reading is from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 4:7-13**

BRETHREN, grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (in saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

**The Gospel Lesson is from Matthew 4:12-17**

AT THAT TIME, Jesus heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth He went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."



After Christ was baptized, the first words that He said were: 'Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand'. Why? Because after we have been baptized, we are always tempted and the only way to end temptation is to repent. But what exactly do these words mean? What is repentance? What is the Kingdom of Heaven? In order to understand the meaning of the word repentance, we must first understand the nature of the opposite of repentance, the reason for repentance - sin.

Sin comes to us in three stages.

Firstly, we have a thought, a temptation towards evil. Secondly, we entertain that thought and imagine its attraction until it becomes irresistible. Thirdly we act on that thought that we have entertained. These are the three stages of sin.

Repentance also has three stages.

Firstly, our consciences are pricked, we have the thought that what we have done is bad. Secondly, we entertain that consciousness and develop it until action becomes irresistible. Thirdly, we act. These are the three stages of repentance. Repentance then is not just an idea, a thought, it is above all an action. Repentance is a change of mind which leads to a practical and visible change in our way of life.

If this is repentance, what then is the Kingdom of Heaven?

Firstly, the Kingdom of Heaven was Christ Himself Who spoke these words to the people of that time, before whom He stood. The Kingdom of Heaven was indeed at hand, for He stood before them. Secondly, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand in another sense and stands before us in the here and now. The Kingdom of Heaven is here and now, but it depends on our willingness to accept Christ and His Holiness, Mercy and Grace. At this very moment each one of us is in fact able to meet God and enter into His eternal joy, but only if we wish to do so through deep repentance. The joy of the Kingdom of Heaven, simply the state of contentment with God, our well-being, is open to all who wish to accept Christ, the Word of God.

There was once a King who was very sad. He was told by his advisors that he should send out servants to find someone who was completely happy, take the shirt from his back and put it on. Then the King would be completely happy. So the King sent out his servants and they searched up and down the kingdom. Eventually one of the royal servants found a man who was completely happy. The servant returned to the King with the good news. The King asked impatiently: 'But where then is the man's shirt?' 'Unfortunately', replied the servant, 'this man who was completely happy was so poor that he did not have a shirt'. In other words the presence of the Kingdom of Heaven depends ultimately not on our external circumstances but on ourselves, on our interior disposition, on our ability to repent.

**Indeed it is only if we repent that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.**

**May God grant us the desire for that repentance.**

**From the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia: Diocese of Great Britain and Ireland**