

January 2, 2026

Daily Reflections



SAINTS BASIL & GREGORY: FOUNDATIONS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

By David C. Robinson, SJ

Excerpts from Today's Readings

Who is the liar? Whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Whoever denies the Father and the Son, this is the antichrist. Anyone who denies the Son does not have the Father, but whoever confesses the Son has the Father as well. Let what you heard from the beginning remain in you. If what you heard from the beginning remains in you, then you will remain in the Son and in the Father.

1 JOHN 2:22-24

This is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to him to ask him, "Who are you?" he admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, "I am not the Christ." So they asked him, "What are you then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?" He said: "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the

way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said." Some Pharisees were also sent. They asked him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ or Elijah, or the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie."

JOHN 1:19-27

Reflection

In the early centuries of the Church, across a multitude of communities and geographies, there was massive and constant debate about the nature and significance of the coming of the Son of God. What did it mean that God was born in human flesh; that Mary was the mother of God's divine life in the world; that God's very nature was constituted by three "Persons"—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? The questions grew in number and complexity, and, for every interpretation that was 'officially' accepted, a plethora of conflicting explanations was generated. Of the many theological personalities who helped to shape the evolving consensus, some stood out as exceptional and brilliantly articulate. Among the most venerated were three theologians from 4th century Cappadocia (modern Turkey), now titled the Cappadocian Fathers: Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianzus. Between the three of them, they espoused teachings that helped to clarify the 'young' faith for believers worldwide. They defended the model of the Trinity, countering the Arians (Jesus was created by God, and therefore not divine), and the Apollinarians (Jesus had a human body, but a divine mind). Basil also formulated a rule of life for monasticism, and organized social services for the poor. They helped to concretize theological, social, moral, and spiritual foundations for the future unfolding of Christian identity in the world.

These theological mysteries and theories might seem like an unusual theme for a spiritual reflection! Yet, when we explore readings like the ones selected for this feast, we realize that the late scriptures from the 1st century communities contain many initial explorations of the mysteries of what we now name the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Communion of Saints, and a long list of others. As we grow and mature as individuals and families of faith, we are led to integrate the history of thought and vision that has grounded the ways in which we seek to illuminate our framework of belief and practice. Each time we immerse our reflection and understanding in the living word of our scriptures and rituals, we are refining and enriching the depths to which our history with God has drawn us through the centuries. God is never confined by our thoughts or ideas, but moves through them to help us shape more profound and enriching ways of sharing what the Spirit has blessed us with throughout time. What a great Christmas gift to carry into the New Year and far beyond!



A Monastic Study
Image created by David C. Robinson, SJ

For Pondering

- Are there particular passages in the Scriptures that have drawn you into deep reflection on the fuller riches of thought and feeling they contain for your walk of faith?
- Have you found teachings encountered in liturgy or a catechism that inspire you to explore the history of their origins?
- Have you ever found yourself trying to clarify any elements of doctrine to another person? What was your experience?

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