

## *The Great Blessing of Water con't*

A protection against disease, a destruction to demons, inaccessible to evil powers and filled with angelic strength; that all who draw from it and drink of it may have it for the cleansing of their soul and body, for the healing of their passions, for the sanctification of their dwellings, and for every purpose that is fitting.

### **ADAPTED THEOPHANY HYMNS**

Today the Maker of heaven and earth comes in the flesh to the Jordan. He Who is sinless asks for Baptism, that He may sanctify the waters and cleanse the world from evil. All creation is illumined. Heaven and earth rejoice. Therefore let us pray to Him with one heart: O Christ, our God, who has appeared as Light shining upon the faithful, have mercy upon us and save the world. Amen.

### **MEDITATION**

Every manifestation of Jesus Christ, both in history and in the inner life of each person, is simultaneously a manifestation of humility and of glory. Whoever tries to separate these two aspects of Christ commits an error which falsifies the whole spiritual life. I cannot approach the glorified Christ without, at the same time, approaching the humiliated Christ, nor the humiliated Christ without approaching the glorified Christ. If I desire Christ to be manifested in me, this cannot come about except through embracing Him who Augustine Delighted to call *Christus humilis* (the lowly or humble Christ), and, in the same upsurge, worshipping Him Who is also God and King.

The Year of the Grace of the Lord, p.82

## **THE FEAST OF LIGHTS**

Our life on earth is especially dependent upon water and light. Water covers most of the earth and interacts with the entire cycle of nature to help things grow. In a comparable way light is essential to photosynthesis, the miracle behind everything that is green. It causes creative changes in the atmosphere and on the surface of the earth. Light allows us to appreciate nature's rich colors. And these two elements—water and light—are the chief symbols for the Holy Theophany of our Lord, or the Feasts of Lights, which we celebrate on January 6.

Theophany is one of the most important feastdays in the Orthodox Church along with Easter / Pascha, Pentecost and Christmas. Theophany commemorates the event of Jesus' baptism. According to the Gospels, when Jesus came to be baptized heaven opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove and God the Father by His heavenly voice gave witness that Jesus was His beloved Son. Jesus' baptism signified not only His divine identity as Son of God but also disclosed the glory of the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Thus, along with the themes of the sanctification of the waters, purification from sin and renewal, Theophany also celebrates **Con't Pg 8**

## **PREPARATION FOR THE BLESSING OF HOMES**

Before the Priest arrives at your home, here are a few reminders on how to prepare:

- In the main room of the home, usually the kitchen or dining room, have placed on the table a white cloth, a candle and /or an Icon or cross. You may place a small container of Holy Water on the table. (Note: Father will be bringing his own.)
- Make a list of those living in the house including pets and all deceased you want prayed for.
- Turn off all TV's, radios, computers, etc. So as to keep focused on the blessing service.
- Make sure that pets are heeled or restrained so as not to get underfoot while Father goes through the home.
- In some customs, someone (usually a child) takes a candle and leads Father through the house while the rest follow.
- If you have any items to be blessed (Icon, Cross, etc.). Put them on the table where the blessing will take place.
- When the priest arrives, have everyone in the home gather around the table and join in the blessing. **PARTICIPATION IS IMPORTANT.**
- Invite friends or neighbors to participate and witness the beauty of this tradition.

**NOTE: Remember, the invitation to the priest to come and bless your home is an invitation to ask for the mercy of God upon the household. The sprinkling of the Holy Water is a sign of God's presence in the home as an extension of His Holy House, the Church. It is a time to renew our commitment to God as we begin another year in His mercy and love for mankind.**

## Feast of the Theophany of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

Commemorated on [January 6](#)

Theophany is the Feast which reveals the Most Holy Trinity to the world through the Baptism of the Lord (Mt.3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). God the Father spoke from Heaven about the Son, the Son was baptized by Saint John the Forerunner, and the Holy Spirit descended upon the Son in the form of a dove. From ancient times this Feast was called the Day of Illumination and the Feast of Lights, since God is Light and has appeared to illumine “those who sat in darkness,” and “in the region of the shadow of death” (Mt.4:16), and to save the fallen race of mankind by grace. In the ancient Church it was the custom to baptize catechumens at the Vespers of Theophany, so that Baptism also is revealed as the spiritual illumination of mankind.

The origin of the Feast of Theophany goes back to Apostolic times, and it is mentioned in The Apostolic Constitutions (Book V:13). From the second century we have the testimony of Saint Clement of Alexandria concerning the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord, and the night vigil before this Feast.

There is a third century dialogue about the services for Theophany between the holy martyr Hippolytus and Saint Gregory the Wonderworker. In the following centuries, from the fourth to ninth century, all the great Fathers of the Church: Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan, John of Damascus, commented on the Feast of Theophany.

The monks Joseph the Studite, Theophanes and Byzantios composed much liturgical music for this Feast, which is sung at Orthodox services even today. Saint John of Damascus said that the Lord was baptized, not because He Himself had need for cleansing, but “to bury human sin by water,” to fulfill the Law, to reveal the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and finally, to sanctify “the nature of water” and to offer us the form and example of Baptism.

On the Feast of the Baptism of Christ, the Holy Church proclaims our faith in the most sublime mystery, incomprehensible to human intellect, of one God in three Persons. It teaches us to confess and glorify the Holy Trinity, one in Essence and Undivided. It exposes and overthrows the errors of ancient teachings which attempted to explain the Creator of the world by reason, and in human terms.

The Church shows the necessity of Baptism for believers in Christ, and it inspires us with a sense of deep gratitude for the illumination and purification of our sinful nature. The Church teaches that our salvation and cleansing from sin is possible only by the power of the grace of the Holy Spirit, therefore it is necessary to preserve worthily these gifts of the grace of holy Baptism, keeping clean this priceless garb, for “As many as have been baptized into

Christ, have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27).

On the day of Theophany, all foods are permitted, even if the Feast falls on a Wednesday or Friday.

### *The Feast of Lights Con't*

The revelation of God to the world. “Theophany” means divine manifestation—the manifestation of God to the world as Trinity, the three great Lights of Father, Son, and Spirit, one in essence and glory.

Some of the themes of the Feast of Theophany are expressed through the following hymns:

When You, O Lord, were baptized in the Jordan, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest. For the voice of the Father bore witness to You, calling You beloved Son, and the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed His word as steadfast. O Christ, our God, Who has appeared and illumined the world: Glory to You! (Theophany Tropar)

Light of Light, Christ our God, God made manifest, has shone upon the world. O people, let us worship Him. (Theophany Hymn of Praises)

The true Light has appeared and bestows enlightenment upon all. Christ Who is above all purity shares baptism with us: He brings sanctification to the water and it becomes a cleansing for souls. The outward event is earthly but the spiritual disclosure is higher than heaven: salvation comes through washing, the spirit is given by means of the water, and immersion signifies our ascent to God. How wonderful are Your works, O Lord: Glory to You! (Theophany Hymn of Praises)

The first of the above hymns tells about the revelation of the Holy Trinity at the time of Jesus' baptism.

The second hymn proclaims Christ as God, the divine Light which comes from Light, God the Father, and shines upon the world.

The third hymn touches on the meaning of baptism which Christ shared with us and which He began as a Christian rite.



## Synaxis of the Holy Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John

Commemorated on [January 7](#)

In the Orthodox Church it is customary, on the day following the Great Feasts of the Lord and the Mother of God, to remember those saints who participated directly in the sacred event. So, on the day following the Theophany of the Lord, the Church honors the one who participated directly in the Baptism of Christ, placing his own hand upon the head of the Savior.

Saint John, the holy Forerunner and Baptist of the Lord, whom the Lord called the greatest of the prophets, concludes the history of the Old Testament and opens the era of the New Testament. The holy Prophet John bore witness to the Only-Begotten Son of God, incarnate in the flesh. Saint John was accounted worthy to baptize Him in the waters of the Jordan, and he was a witness of the Theophany of the Most Holy Trinity on the day of the Savior's Baptism.

The holy Prophet John was related to the Lord on His mother's side, the son of the Priest Zachariah and Righteous Elizabeth. The holy Forerunner, John, was born six months before Christ. The Archangel Gabriel announced his birth in the Temple at Jerusalem, revealing to Zachariah that a son was to be born to him.

Through the prayers offered beforehand, the child was filled with the Holy Spirit. Saint John prepared himself in the wilds of the desert for his great service by a strict life, by fasting, prayer and sympathy for the fate of God's people.

At the age of thirty, he came forth preaching repentance. He appeared on the banks of the Jordan, to prepare the people by his preaching to accept the Savior of the world. In church hymnology, Saint John is called a "bright morning star," whose gleaming outshone the brilliance of all the other stars, announcing the coming dawn of the day of grace, illumined with the light of the spiritual Sun, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Having baptized the sinless Lamb of God, Saint John soon died a martyr's death, beheaded by the sword on orders of King Herod at the request of his daughter Salome. (On Saint John the Baptist, see Mt.3:1-16, 11:1-19, 14:1-12; Mark 1:2-8, 6:14-29; Luke 1:5-25, 39-80, 3:1-20, 7:18-35, 9:7-9; John 1:19-34, 3:22-26). The Transfer of the Right Hand of the holy Forerunner from Antioch to Constantinople (956) and the Miracle of Saint John the Forerunner against the Hagarenes (Moslems) at Chios:

The body of Saint John the Baptist was buried in the Samaritan city of Sebaste. The holy Evangelist Luke, who went preaching Christ in various cities and towns, came to Sebaste, where they gave him the right hand of

the holy Prophet John, the very hand with which he had baptized the Savior. The Evangelist Luke took it with him to his native city of Antioch.

When the Moslems seized Antioch centuries later, a deacon named Job brought the holy hand of the Forerunner from Antioch to Chalcedon. From there, on the eve of the Theophany of the Lord, it was transferred to Constantinople (956) and kept thereafter.

In the year 1200, the Russian pilgrim Dobrynya, who later became Saint Anthony, Archbishop of Novgorod (February 10), saw the right hand of the Forerunner in the imperial palace. From the Lives of the Saints we learn that in the year 1263, during the capture of Constantinople by the Crusaders, the emperor Baldwin gave one bone from the wrist of Saint John the Baptist to Ottonus de Cichon, who then gave it to a Cistercian abbey in France.

The right hand continued to be kept in Constantinople. And at the end of the fourteenth to the beginning of the fifteenth centuries, the holy relic was seen at Constantinople in the Peribleptos monastery by the Russian pilgrims Stephen of Novgorod, the deacon Ignatius, the cantor Alexander and the deacon Zosimus. When Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, sacred objects were gathered up at the the conqueror's orders and kept under lock in the imperial treasury.

In the Lives of the Saints is clear testimony that in the year 1484 the right hand of the holy Forerunner was given away by the son of the Moslem sultan Bayazet to the knights of Rhodes to gain their good will, since a dangerous rival for Bayazet, his own brother, had allied himself with them. A contemporary participant, the vice-chancellor of Rhodes, Wilhelm Gaorsan Gallo, also speaks of this event. The knights of Rhodes, having established their base on the island of Malta (in the Mediterranean Sea), then transferred the sacred relic they had received to Malta.

When the Russian Tsar Paul I (1796-1801) became Grand Master of the Maltese Order in honor of the holy Prophet John, the right hand of the Baptist, part of the Life-Creating Cross and the Philermos Icon (October 12) of the Mother of God (from Mt Philermos on the island of Rhodes) were transferred in 1799 from the island of Malta to Russia [because of the Napoleonic threat], to the chapel at Gatchina (October 12). In the same year these sacred items were transferred into the church dedicated to the Icon of the Savior Not Made by Hands at the Winter Palace. A special service was composed for this Feast.

## WHY DO WE BLESS OUR HOMES

Why do we bless houses (and almost anything else that we can sprinkle) with Holy Water?

This world, this creation, is in captivity; it is enemy held territory. The evil one, having enslaved all of creation at the fall, has laid claim to every nook and cranny of this earth. And for a while it looked as though he might be able to hold onto it. But then he reached too far and attempted to enslave the Master of All and to bind Life with the chains of death and his power was broken. But creation is still fallen, it is still contested land in the spiritual battle.

We, as Christians, are engaged in this struggle to reclaim fallen nature for the Kingdom of God. We often talk about this in terms of our own salvation, but the Church, addressing all of creation in a wholistic manner, also reaches out and reclaims a bit here and a bit there of creation in general. We do this in order that we might restore the usefulness of creation for working out our own salvation. Hence we bless anything that might help us in our salvation - and by blessing it we reclaim it for the Kingdom of God.

There are few things more vital to our lives than our homes. In our homes we pray, we work, we talk to others, we order our lives, we work out our marriages, etc. What more important place to reclaim for the Kingdom of God - or is it better to continue living in a place which is occupied by the enemy. For the most effective working out of our salvation, we must drive the enemy out of our homes, and keep him at bay by our prayers, our righteous life, and the annual sprinkling by Holy Water at Theophany.

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Let us not render evil for evil, and we shall not receive our due for our sins. For we find the forgiveness of our trespasses in the forgiving of our brothers; and the mercy of God is hidden in mercifulness to our neighbor. Therefore the Lord said, "Forgive and you shall be forgiven," (2 Peter 2:22). And, "With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again." See how the Lord bestowed on us the method of salvation and has given us eternal power to become sons of God. So, finally then, our salvation is in our will's grasp.

~ St. Maximos the Confessor ~

## IDENTICAL WE ARE NOT

Why do we Orthodox celebrate the baptism of Jesus on Epiphany when other Christian faiths celebrate the Magi visiting Jesus?

Although Orthodox Christians and non-Orthodox Christians celebrate Epiphany on January 6th, there is a difference in what they celebrate. Both agree that the word "epiphany" means manifestation or revelation. The Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches celebrate different aspects of God's revelation to man.

The Lutherans believe that Epiphany marks the end of the Christmas season. Their celebration begins with the three magi coming to worship the newborn King, and ends with the feast of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. On Epiphany, the Roman Catholic Church celebrates the revelation of Christ to the three magi, the revelation of Christ at His baptism, and the revelation of Christ with His first miracle at the Wedding of Cana.

On January 6th, the Orthodox Church celebrates the revelation of the Holy Trinity, the baptism of Christ, and the enlightenment of humanity. The Church not only refers to this feast as Epiphany, but also Theophany and the Feasts of Lights (*Ta Phota*). The word Theophany means the revelation — manifestation of God. Along with the baptism of Christ, another very special event took place. Until the baptism of Christ, no one knew that God was Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the revelation that the Orthodox Christians are celebrating at Epiphany.

The reason Epiphany is also called the Feast of Lights is because of the revelation of the Holy Trinity on this day has enlightened the whole world, and given us a greater understanding about Who God is.

*Courtesy of Fr. Ted Poteres, SS Constantine & Helen Cathedral, Merrillville, IN*

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Why is there so much evil in the world today? Because people have thrown away their most reliable weapon, the all-victorious weapon with which every evil, every sin, and every demon are assuredly vanquished on all battlefields. And this weapon is prayer—prayer and fasting. It is the most reliable weaponry, because it is God's weaponry; the most reliable, all-victorious weaponry because it is Christ's weaponry—the weaponry of the only true God in all realms.

~ St. Justin Popovich ~