

The Voice In The Wilderness

"A voice crying in the wilderness:
Prepare ye the way of the LORD..."
Matthew 3:3

The Newsletter of St. John the Forerunner Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church, the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America, an Orthodox Christian witness to Cedar Park and Central Texas.

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Icon of the Theophany of the Lord Jesus Christ

THEOPHANY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST JANUARY 6

January 6th is the feast day of Theophany. It was one of the first feast days of the early church and originally included the celebration of the Nativity of Christ, the adoration of the Magi, and the Meeting of the Lord or Presentation of the Lord at the Temple. The feasts were divided into separate feast days in the fourth century.

The Orthodox Christian Church now observes the baptism of Jesus Christ by John the Baptist in the Jordan River or the Theophany on January 6. The Feast is significant because it now commemorates the first appearance of the Holy Trinity in the New Testament.

You may know the Feast of the Theophany by another name, The Epiphany. The Greek meaning of the word Theophany is "the appearance of God." Epiphany in Greek means "to show forth" or "to manifest." As a result you may find these two words used interchangeably within the Orthodox Church.

In most orthodox Churches, main observance of this feast is the Great Blessing of Water. In the ancient Church, there were two blessings: one for the blessing of water intended for baptism and the other of outside bodies of water. In this way, Christians who lived outside of Palestine imitated the custom of the Christians in Jerusalem who went to the Jordan River to celebrate the feast.

"And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water, and lo, the heavens were opened up to him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him. And lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:16-17)

In St. John Chrysostom's Homilies, he stated, "The heavens were opened to show us that our baptism will open the heavens for us. God is made accessible to us. We can know the Unknowable. We can be changed. A good work is done in us, and we have the means to have the promise fulfilled in us."

As we noted before. It is the Tradition of the Holy Orthodox Church to Bless Water in the Church. This "Blessed" or "Holy Water" is then sprinkled on everything, so that all creation might receive the sanctification that the River Jordan received at the time of the Baptism of Our Lord by St. John the Baptist.

The Liturgical text of the Great Blessing of the Water, shows this most strongly to us as the clergy prays: "That this water be sanctified by the power, act, and descent of the Holy Spirit. . . That in this water may be planted the action of purification which belongeth to the Trinity transcendent in essence . . . That it may be granted the grace of redemption and the blessing of the Jordan . . . That we may be lighted by the light of knowledge and true worship, by the descent of the Holy Spirit . . . That this water may become a gift for sanctification, redemption for sins, for the healing of soul and body, and for every meet benefit. . . That this water may be beneficial for eternal life . . . That it may drive away all the cunning devices of our enemies, visible and invisible . . .

For those who drink therefrom and take home for the sanctification of their homes. . . That it may be for those who drink and receive therefrom in faith, a purification for their souls and bodies . . . That we may be worthy to be filled with sanctification, as we receive of these waters, by the appearance of the Holy Spirit, in an invisible manner. . ."

The Liturgical text teaches us that this Holy Water is a means by which the Church, through the Holy Spirit, has been given the grace to sanctify all of creation. Yet the key work here is "sanctification". This sanctification comes to the faithful, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, as a Healing, and Promise of Eternal Life. It is gift given freely to those who have been baptized and are a part of the Body of Christ.

To the Christian who is orthodox in his/her faith, attend the Services of the Church, confess your sins, and worthily receive the Holy Body and Blood of Our Lord. The power of this Holy Theophany water will have great effect upon your soul. It will heal your illnesses, bind your emotional wounds, and sanctify your homes.

The Holy Water of Theophany, through the Holy Spirit, does indeed sanctify your home. Father Gabriel Barrow notes that "Any time we receive a Blessing and Sanctification from the Church, this Sanctification carries with it many duties and responsibilities. In the case of the Blessing of our Homes, or any object with Holy Water, we must promise God that this Holy Water is a means by which we consecrate ourselves, our homes, and our possessions to the Glory of God." In order to get the benefits of the blessing we must commit our lives and possessions to the service of God.

What does Holy Water do?

"The Holy Water performs a two-fold sacramental action: 1) It cleanses of evil — it is a means by which we purify ourselves, our homes, or any object, casting out any devil that might be in it, and 2) It consecrates to God — having cast out the evil, we dedicate ourselves, our homes, or any object to the exclusive service and glorification of Almighty God. We promise that our homes will no longer be places of anger and places of sin. Instead, we dedicate them as places of love and as dwellings of those who are honored to be followers of the Holy Orthodox Faith. Thus, to receive the Blessings of the Church upon yourself, your home, or on any of your possessions, and then not to use them for Christ, or moreover, to use them against Christ through any form of evil or sin, is an extreme contradiction of the Blessing itself." (Father Gabriel Barrow, *Word Magazine*, January 1976 Page 3)

When we partake of the Holy water of Theophany and the Blessing of Our Homes, we in reality are promising God that during the coming year our families and our homes will be dedicated to Him and to the work of His Holy Church. If we do so, we will receive "the grace of redemption and the blessing of the Jordan."

ORTHOPRAXIS: Blessing of the Home at Theophany

When an Orthodox Christian believer moves into a new home, he dedicates his new home as the abode of a follower of Christ. He asks that God, the source of all goodness and the Giver of every perfect gift, to bless his house and all that is within it; he recalls that Jesus Christ, His Son, came to bring Salvation to it, even as He brought Salvation to the house of Zaccheus; he prays that the Holy Spirit may abide in it, guiding those who dwell in it in the Paths of righteousness.

A long held praxis in the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church is the Tradition of having one's priest visit and bless your home with Holy Water blessed during the Theophany Sanctification of Waters. As we have noted above the Feast of Theophany (or Epiphany) commemorates the Baptism of our Lord in the Jordan River by John the Forerunner. The troparion of the day teaches us that "the Trinity was made manifest" to us on Theophany. Catherine Aslanoff notes that "When Jesus descends into the depths of the river, there occurs a profound upheaval. It is not the one baptized who is purified, for he is spotless; but it is the water that is transfigured and illumined. This water, which was believed to be transparent and purifying, is in fact polluted, inhabited by evil spirits, servants of the old gods. By purifying the elements, by sanctifying matter, Jesus frees the cosmos from the powers of evil." (*The Incarnate God, Vol. I*, Catherine Aslanoff, translated by Paul Meyendorff, p.163.)

The Great Blessing of Water and the Home

The Great Blessing of Water takes place at the end of the Divine Liturgy for Theophany. Since our homes cannot be brought to the Church, the Church through the priest comes to our home. There the service of blessing, which began in the church, is finished with the sprinkling of water in the home. Traditionally, in most Orthodox parishes, the priest personally visits all his parishioners each year to pray with them in the place where they live, and to bless their surroundings with the newly sanctified water of Theophany (January 6). By sanctifying our living quarters, our private place, we extend the grace of God to our individual dwellings. We may also choose to bring the blessed water to our homes to use throughout the year to bless our homes and to drink whether we are ill or as part of our daily prayer life. "There are many occasions in family life when a sip of holy water can help to remind us of the blessing that was given 'to bestow sanctification', 'unto healing of soul and body', 'to be a fountain

welling forth unto life eternal', as the priest prayed in the litany of Epiphany day." (*Little Falcons: Water*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1998, p.33.)

The Family Church

Each of our homes is a family church, a temple where the most-high God in Trinity is worshipped and praised. "The blessing of homes by these holy waters maintains the spiritual association between the 'family church' and the parish, as well as again providing for the sharing of God's spiritual gifts. . ." (*Marriage and the Christian Home*, p. 25.)

If possible ask your priest to come to bless the home when the children are present. This is important as it provides the opportunity for the children to see the parish priest in a different and very personal situation. If the priest permits, the children may lead the way through the house, or hold a candle. They can show him their rooms or pets or favorite toys. They receive a blessing with water. For children, the house blessing connects the parish more directly to their home and their everyday lives.

Getting Ready for Home Blessing

To prepare for the priest's visit to bless your home:

- Make a list of the first names of those family members you wish to pray for when the priest arrives, with the living and the deceased in separate columns.
- Bring home from Theophany enough candles for everyone in the home to hold one during the house blessing.
- On your dining room table or family altar, place a lighted candle, a Theophany icon or icon of Christ, and a wide bowl (to hold the holy water the priest will bring). Be sure your prayer list is there, too!
- Turn *on* a light in each room, so the priest can see where he is going
- Turn *off* all TVs, stereos, and computers.
- Secure any pets that might jump up on the priest or family, or "get underfoot" as you move from room to room. (Pets may be blessed, too!)



This picture is an example of how to set up the area for the priest to prepare to serve the House Blessing. The items that you should have available are:

A bowl of water for the priest to bless.

1. a lit candle
2. Icon(s) may include the Icon of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Theotokos, or the Festal Icon of the Theophany of Christ.
3. Many people will provide a bouquet of Basil Leaves for the priest to use to sprinkle the blessed water throughout the home. (Please note that your priest may bring a Holy Water sprinkler already filled with Theophany water to bless the home)
4. Copies of the Troparion for the family to sing.
5. Candles from Church for each member of the family to hold as they follow the priest from room to room.

Everyone in the house when the priest arrives should gather around the icon corner or family altar and join in the singing of the litany responses and troparion. Here is a nice version of the troparion to learn and sing during your house blessing.

THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST Troparion - Tone 1

Russian Imperial Court Chant
arr. from Lvov/Bakhmetev

Soprano
Alto

When You, O Lord, were baptized in the Jordan, the

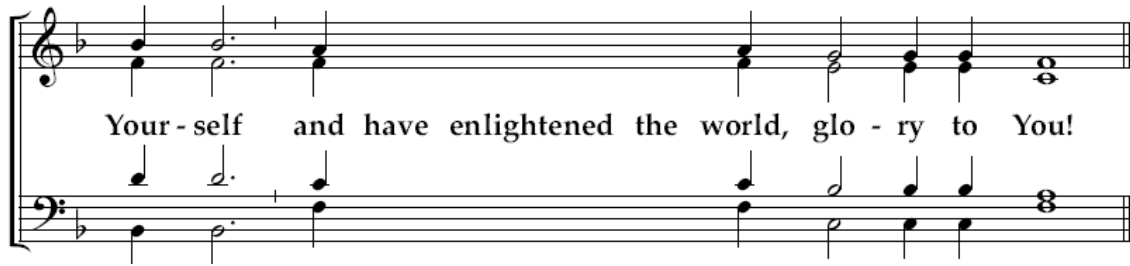
Tenor
Bass

worship of the Trinity was made man-i - fest, for the voice of

the Fa - ther bore wit - ness to You, and called You His be - loved

Son, and the Spir - it, in the form of a dove, confirmed the

truth - ful - ness of His word. O Christ our God, You have re - vealed



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House Blessing Prayer

O God, our True Light and Savior, You have deigned to be baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist to renew all men by the cleansing water of regeneration (Tit. 3:5) and to enter under the roof of Zacchaeus, bringing salvation to him and his house (Lk. 19:9), now, You, O Lord, protect also all those who dwell in this house from all harm and injury; grant them Jordan's blessing, purification of soul and body, and good health; and hear all their supplications, which are for their salvation and life eternal.

For blessed are You, O Lord, together with Your Eternal Father and Holy Spirit, now and ever, and forever. Amen

In Conclusion:

When we seek to have our homes blessed during the Theophany season, we are asking God to bless us. In order to receive these blessings, as Orthodox Christians, we must dedicate not only ourselves but also our houses to the Lord. We must dedicate our daily work and all of our efforts as well. All things are to be done to the glory of God. That is why in the Orthodox Church, not only religious objects, such as icons, crosses, churches and vestments, are blessed, but also homes, fields, animals and all objects which are used in our daily life for the good of man. In this the Church expresses its faith that the Holy Spirit's sanctifying action extends over the whole Creation. We confirm this belief when we ask for our homes to be blessed by the Church.

(Adapted from various sources including Getting Ready for a House Blessing by Nichola Toda Krause, Orthodox Family Life, Volume 1 Issue 2, Making God Real in the Orthodox Christian Home by Father Anthony Conaris, Light & Life Publishing, Minneapolis, MN 55416, Why Do We Have Our Homes Blessed? by Phyllis Meshel Onest, M.Div., Orthodox Family Life, Volume 4 Issue 2)

2007 House Blessing Schedule

Monday, Jan 8 am Georgetown

Al Khoury 9am, Bruce and Pat Khoury, Onjanow, Shynkar, Parsons

Monday, Jan 8 pm Austin

Treckman 6:30pm, Locket, Dickinson, MacLaughlin, Thurston, Dunn, Galloway

Tuesday, Jan 9 pm Austin

Long 5pm, Harding, Brown, Barber, Mahoney, Hrissikoupolis, Medford, Shaw, Zozuyla

Saturday, Jan 13 Temple/Killeen/Burnet
Wilson/Montgomery 8am, Sisco/Bailey, Juliano, Macdonald

Sunday, Jan 14 Leander/Cedar Park
Bays 4pm, Easley, Sheron Jones, Latta, Castor, Carlisle, Knight, Bodnarchuk, King

Monday, Jan 15 Cedar Park
Falkowski 7pm, Wright, Kelly, Peacock, Pitts, Sterzing, Thurner

Tuesday, Jan 16 Round Rock/Pflugerville
Bennett 6pm, Hollapeter, Hampton, Lewis, Poe, Hatfield, Michaelis

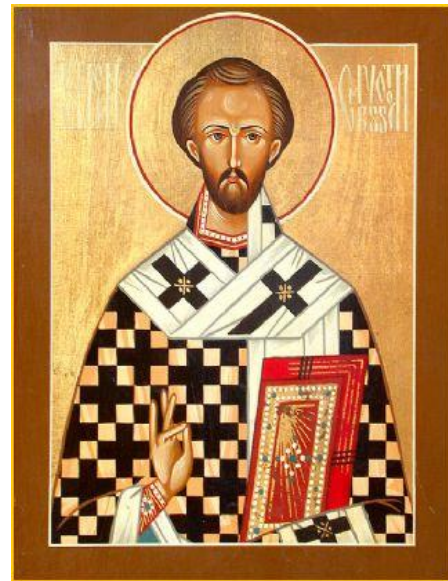
Wednesday, Jan 17 Kerrville
Benson, Lewis

Thursday, Jan 18 Elgin/Taylor
Nelson 5pm, Garcia

Discourse On The Day of The Baptism of Christ

by St. John Chrysostom,
Archbishop of Constantinople

We shall now say something about the present feast. Many celebrate the feast days and know their designations, but the cause for which they were established they know not. Thus concerning this, that the present feast is called Theophany -- everyone knows; but what this is -- Theophany, and whether it be one thing or another, they know not. And this is shameful -- every year to celebrate the feast day and not know its reason.



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First of all therefore, it is necessary to say that there is not one Theophany, but two: the one actual, which already has occurred, and the second in future, which will happen with glory at the end of the world. About this one and about the other you will hear today from Paul, who in conversing with Titus, speaks thus about the present: "The grace of God hath revealed itself, having saved all mankind, decreeing, that we reject iniquity and worldly desires, and dwell in the present age in prudence and in righteousness and piety" -- and about the future: "awaiting the blessed hope and glorious appearance of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Tit 2:11-13). And a prophet speaks thus about this latter:

"the sun shalt turn to darkness, and the moon to blood at first, then shalt come the great and illuminating Day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31). Why is not that day, on which the Lord was born, considered Theophany -- but rather this day on which He was baptised? This present day it is, on which He was baptised and sanctified the nature of water. Because on this day all, having obtained the waters, do carry it home and keep it all year, since today the waters are sanctified; and an obvious phenomenon occurs: these waters in their essence do not spoil with the passage of time, but obtained today, for one whole year and often for two or three years, they remain unharmed and fresh, and afterwards for a long time do not stop being water, just as that obtained from the fountains.

Why then is this day called Theophany? Because Christ made Himself known to all -- not then when He was born -- but then when He was baptised. Until this time He was not known to the people. And that the people did not know Him, Who He was, listen about this to John the Baptist, who says: "Amidst you standeth, Him Whom ye know not of" (Jn.1:26). And is it surprising that others did not know Him, when even the Baptist did not know Him until that day? "And I -- said he -- knew Him not: but He that did send me to baptise with water, about This One did tell unto me: over Him that shalt see the Spirit descending and abiding upon Him, This One it is Who baptiseth in the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 1:33). Thus from this it is evident, that -- there are two Theophanies, and why Christ comes at baptism and on whichever baptism He comes, about this it is necessary to say: it is therefore necessary to know both the one and equally the other. And first it is necessary to speak your love about the latter, so that we might learn about the former. There was a Jewish baptism, which cleansed from bodily impurities, but not to remove sins. Thus, whoever committed adultery, or decided on thievery, or who did some other kind of misdeed, it did not free him from guilt. But whoever touched the bones of the dead, whoever tasted food forbidden by the law, whoever approached from contamination, whoever consorted with lepers -- that one washed, and until evening was impure, and then cleansed. "Let one wash his body in pure water -- it says in the Scriptures, -- and he will be unclean until evening, and then he will be clean" (Lev 15:5, 22:4). This was not truly of sins or impurities, but since the Jews lacked perfection, then God, accomplishing it by means of this greater piety, prepared them by their beginnings for a precise observance of important things.

Thus, Jewish cleansings did not free from sins, but only from bodily impurities. Not so with ours: it is far more sublime and it manifests a great grace, whereby it sets free from sin, it cleanses the spirit and bestows the gifts of the Spirit. And the baptism of John was far more sublime than the Jewish, but less so than ours: it was like a bridge between both baptisms, leading across itself from the first to the last. Wherefore John did not give guidance for observance of bodily purifications, but together with them he exhorted and advised to be converted from vice to good deeds and to trust in the hope of salvation and the accomplishing of good deeds, rather than in different washings and purifications by water. John did not say: wash your clothes, wash your body, and ye will be pure, but what? -- "bear ye fruits worthy of repentance" (Mt 3:8). Since it was more than of the Jews, but less than ours: the baptism of John did not impart the Holy Spirit and it did not grant forgiveness by grace: it gave the commandment to repent, but it was powerless to absolve sins. Wherefore John did also say: "I baptise you with water...That One however will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Mt 3:11). Obviously, he did not baptise with the Spirit. But what does this mean: "with the Holy Spirit and with fire?" Call to mind that day, on which for the Apostles "there appeared disparate tongues like fire, and sat over each one of them" (Acts 2:3). And that the baptism of John did not impart the Spirit and remission of sins is evident from the following: Paul "found certain disciples, and said to them: received ye the Holy Spirit since ye have believed? They said to him: but furthermore whether it be of the Holy Spirit, we shall hear. He said to them: into what were ye baptised? They answered: into the baptism of John. Paul then said: John indeed baptised with the baptism of repentance," -- repentance, but not remission of sins; for whom did he baptise? "Having proclaimed to the people, that they should believe in the One coming after him, namely, Christ Jesus. Having heard this, they were baptised in the Name of the Lord Jesus: and Paul laying his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon

them" (Acts 19:1-6). Do you see, how incomplete was the baptism of John? If the one were not incomplete, would then Paul have baptised them again, and placed his hands on them; having performed also the second, he shew the superiority of the apostolic Baptism and that the baptism of John was far less than his. Thus, from this we recognise the difference of the baptisms.

Now it is necessary to say, for whom was Christ baptised and by which baptism? Neither the former the Jewish, nor the last -- ours. Whence hath He need for remission of sins, how is this possible for Him, Who hath not any sins? "Of sin, -- it says in the Scriptures, -- worked He not, nor was there deceit found in His mouth" (1 Pet 2:22); and further, "who of you convicteth Me of Sin?" (Jn 8:46). And His flesh was privy to the Holy Spirit; how might this be possible, when it in the beginning was fashioned by the Holy Spirit? And so, if His flesh was privy to the Holy Spirit, and He was not subject to sins, then for whom was He baptised? But first of all it is necessary for us to recognise, by which baptism He was baptised, and then it will be clear for us. By which baptism indeed was He baptised? -- Not the Jewish, nor ours, nor John's. For whom, since thou from thine own aspect of baptism dost perceive, that He was baptised not by reason of sin and not having need of the gift of the Spirit; therefore, as we have demonstrated, this baptism was alien to the one and to the other. Hence it is evident, that He came to Jordan not for the forgiveness of sins and not for receiving the gifts of the Spirit. But so that some from those present then should not think, that He came for repentance like others, listen to how John precluded this. What he then spoke to the others then was: "Bear ye fruits worthy of repentance"; but listen what he said to Him: "I have need to be baptised of Thee, and Thou art come to me?" (Mt 3:8, 14). With these words he demonstrated, that Christ came to him not through that need with which people came, and that He was so far from the need to be baptised for this reason -- so much more sublime and perfectly purer than Baptism itself. For whom was He baptised, if this was done not for repentance, nor for the remission of sins, nor for receiving the gifts of the Spirit? Through the other two reasons, of which about the one the disciple speaks, and about the other He Himself spoke to John. Which reason of this baptism did John declare? Namely, that Christ should become known to the people, as Paul also mentions: "John therefore baptised with the baptism of repentance, so that through him they should believe on Him that cometh" (Acts 19:4); this was the consequence of the baptism. If John had gone to the home of each and, standing at the door, had spoken out for Christ and said: "He is the Son of God," such a testimony would have been suspicious, and this deed would have been extremely perplexing. So too, if he in advocating Christ had gone into the synagogues and witnessed to Him, this testimony of his might be suspiciously fabricated. But when all the people thronged out from all the cities to Jordan and remained on the banks of the river, and when He Himself came to be baptised and received the testimony of the Father by a voice from above and by the coming-upon of the Spirit in the form of a dove, then the testimony of John about Him was made beyond all questioning. And since he said: "and I knew Him not" (Jn 1:31), his testimony put forth is trustworthy. They were kindred after the flesh between themselves "wherefore Elizabeth, thy kinswoman, hath also conceived a son" -- said the Angel to Mary about the mother of John (Lk. 1: 36); if however the mothers were relatives, then obviously so also were the children. Thus, since they were kinsmen -- in order that it should not seem that John would testify concerning Christ because of kinship, the grace of the Spirit organized it such, that John spent all his early years in the wilderness, so that it should not seem that John had declared his testimony out of friendship or some similar reason. But John, as he was instructed of God, thus also announced about Him, wherein also he did say: "and I knew Him not." From whence didst thou find out? "He having sent me that sayeth to baptise with water, That One did tell me" What did He tell thee? "Over Him thou shalt see the Spirit descending, like to a dove, and abiding over Him, That One is baptised by the Holy Spirit" (Jn 1:32-33). Dost thou see, that the Holy Spirit did not descend as in a first time then coming down upon Him, but in order to point out that preached by His inspiration -- as though by a finger, it pointed Him out to all. For this reason He came to baptism.

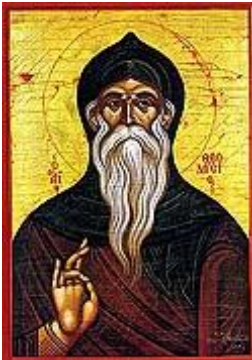
And there is a second reason, about which He Himself spoke -- what exactly is it? When John said: "I have need to be baptised of Thee, and Thou art come to me?" -- He answered thus: "stay now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill every righteousness" (Mt 3:14-15). Dost thou see the meekness of the servant? Dost thou see the humility of the Master? What does He mean: "to fulfill every righteousness?" By righteousness is meant the fulfillment of all the commandments, as is said: "both were righteous, walking faultlessly in the commandments of the Lord" (Lk 1:6). Since fulfilling this righteousness was necessary for all people -- but no one of them kept it or fulfilled it -- Christ came then and fulfilled this righteousness.

And what righteousness is there, someone will say, in being baptised? Obedience for a prophet was righteous. As Christ was circumcised, offered sacrifice, kept the Sabbath and observed the Jewish feasts, so also He added this remaining thing, that He was obedient to having been baptised by a prophet. It was the will of God then, that all should be baptised -- about which listen, as John speaks: "He having sent me to baptise with water" (Jn 1:33); so also Christ: "the publicans and the people do justify God, having been baptised with the baptism of John; the pharisees and the lawyers reject the counsel of God concerning themselves, not having been baptised by him" (Lk 7:29-30). Thus, if obedience to God constitutes righteousness, and God sent John to baptise the nation, then Christ has also fulfilled this along with all the other commandments.

Consider, that the commandments of the law is the main point of the two denarii: this -- debt, which our race has needed to pay; but we did not pay it, and we, falling under such an accusation, are embraced by death. Christ came, and finding us afflicted by it -- He paid the debt, fulfilled the necessary and seized from it those, who were not able to pay. Wherefore He does not say: "it is necessary for us to do this or that," but rather "to fulfill every righteousness." "It is for Me, being the Master, -- says He, -- proper to make payment for the needy." Such was the reason for His baptism -- wherefore they should see, that He had fulfilled all the law -- both this reason and also that, about which was spoken of before. Wherefore also the Spirit did descend as a dove: because where there is reconciliation with God -- there also is the dove. So also in the ark of Noah the dove did bring the branch of olive -- a sign of God's love of mankind and of the cessation of the flood. And now in the form of a dove, and not in a body -- this particularly deserves to be noted -- the Spirit descended, announcing the universal mercy of God and showing with it, that the spiritual man needs to be gentle, simple and innocent, as Christ also says: "Except ye be converted and become as children, ye shalt not enter into the Heavenly Kingdom" (Mt 18:3). But that ark, after the cessation of the flood, remained upon the earth; this ark, after the cessation of wrath, is taken to heaven, and now this Immaculate and Imperishable Body is situated at the right hand of the Father.

Having made mention about the Body of the Lord, I shall also say a little about this, and then the conclusion of the talk. Many now will approach the Holy Table on the occasion of the feast. But some approach not with trembling, but shoving, hitting others, blazing with anger, shouting, cursing, roughing it up with their fellows with great confusion. What, tell me, art thou troubled by, my fellow? What disturbeth thee? Do urgent affairs, for certain, summon thee? At this hour art thou particularly aware, that these affairs of thine that thou particularly rememberest, that thou art situated upon the earth, and dost thou think to mix about with people? But is it not with a soul of stone naturally to think, that in such a time thou stand upon the earth, and not exult with the Angels with whom to raise up victorious song to God? For this Christ also did describe us with eagles, saying: "where the corpse is, there are the eagles gathered" (Mt 24:28) -- so that we might have risen to heaven and soared to the heights, having ascended on the wings of the spirit; but we, like snakes, crawl upon the earth and eat dirt. Having been invited to supper, thou, although satiated before others, would not dare to leave before others while others are still reclining. But here, when the sacred doings are going on, thou at the very middle would pass by everything and leave? Is it for a worthy excuse? What excuse might it be? Judas, having communed that last evening on that final

night, left hastily then as all the others were still reclining. Here these also are in imitation of him, who leave before the final blessing! If he had not gone, then he would not have made the betrayal; if he did not leave his co-disciples, then he would not have perished; if he had not removed himself from the flock, then the wolf would not have seized and devoured him alone; if he had separated himself from the Pastor, then he would not have made himself the prey of wild beasts. Wherefore he (Judas) was with the Jews, and those (the apostles) went out with the Lord. Dost thou see, by what manner the final prayer after the offering of the sacrifice is accomplished? We should, beloved, stand forth for this, we should ponder this, fearful of the coming judgment for this. We should approach the Holy Sacrifice with great decorum, with proper piety, so as to merit us more of God's benevolence, to cleanse one's soul and to receive eternal blessings, of which may we all be worthy by the grace and love for mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, to with Whom the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, power, and worship now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.



Great Monastic Saints to Live By

Saint Theodosius the Great lived during the fifth-sixth centuries, and was the founder of cenobitic monasticism. He was born in Cappadocia of pious parents. Endowed with a splendid voice, he zealously toiled at church reading and singing. St Theodosius prayed fervently that the Lord would guide him on the way to salvation. In his early years he visited the Holy Land and met with St Simeon the Stylite (September 1), who blessed him and predicted future pastoral service for him.

**Venerable Theodosius
the Great, the
Cenobiarich**

**Commemorated on
January 11**

Yearning for the solitary life, Saint Theodosius settled in Palestine into a desolate cave, in which, according to Tradition, the three Magi had spent the night, having come to worship the Savior after His Nativity. He lived there for thirty years in great abstinence and unceasing prayer. People flocked to the ascetic, wishing to live under his guidance. When the cave could no longer hold all the monks, St Theodosius prayed that the Lord Himself would indicate a place for the monks. Taking a censer with cold charcoal and incense, the monk started walking into the desert.

At a certain spot the charcoal ignited by itself and the incense smoke began to rise. Here the monk established the first cenobitic monastery, or Lavra (meaning "broad" or populous"). Soon the Lavra of St Theodosius became renowned, and up to 700 monks gathered at it. According to the final testament of St Theodosius, the Lavra rendered service to neighbor, giving aid to the poor and providing shelter for wanderers.

St Theodosius was extremely compassionate. Once, when there was a famine in Palestine and a multitude of people gathered at the monastery, the monk gave orders to allow everyone into the monastery enclosure. His disciples were annoyed, knowing that the monastery did not have the means to feed all those who had come. But when they went into the bakery, they saw that through the prayers of the abba, it was filled with bread. This miracle was repeated every time St Theodosius wanted to help the destitute.

At the monastery St Theodosius built an home for taking in strangers, separate infirmaries for monks and laymen, and also a shelter for the dying. Seeing that people from various lands gathered at the Lavra, the saint arranged for services in the various languages: Greek, Georgian and Armenian. All gathered to receive the Holy Mysteries in the large church, where divine services were chanted in Greek.

During the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius (491-518) there arose the heresy of Eutychius and Severus, which recognized neither the sacraments nor the clergy. The emperor accepted the false teaching, and the Orthodox began to suffer persecution. St Theodosius stood firmly in defense of Orthodoxy and wrote a letter to the emperor on behalf of the monks, in which they denounced him and refuted the heresy with the teachings of the Ecumenical Councils. He affirmed moreover, that the desert-dwellers and monks would firmly support the Orthodox teaching. The emperor showed restraint for a short while, but then he renewed his persecution of the Orthodox. The holy Elder then showed great zeal for the truth. Leaving the monastery, he came to Jerusalem and in the church, he stood at the high place and cried out for all to hear: "Whoever does not honor the four Ecumenical Councils, let him be anathema!" For this bold deed the monk was sent to prison, but soon returned after the death of the emperor.

St Theodosius accomplished many healings and other miracles during his life, coming to the aid of the needy. Through his prayers he once destroyed the locusts devastating the fields in Palestine. Also by his intercession, soldiers were saved from death, and he also saved those perishing in shipwrecks and those lost in the desert.

Once, the saint gave orders to strike the semandron (a piece of wood hit with a mallet), so that the brethren would gather at prayer. He told them, "The wrath of God draws near the East." After several days it became known that a strong earthquake had destroyed the city of Antioch at the very hour when the saint had summoned the brethren to prayer.

Before his death, St Theodosius summoned to him three beloved bishops and revealed to them that he would soon depart to the Lord. After three days, he died at the age of 105. The saint's body was buried with reverence in the cave in which he lived at the beginning of his ascetic deeds.



January 21, 2007, is the Sunday that precedes the 34th anniversary of the tragic Supreme Court Decision of *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion in the United States. This Supreme Court decision overturned all moral and logical reasoning that most citizens of our society held and practiced. Since 1973, over 43 million lives have been aborted. Approximately 93% of the women who have had abortions cited they did so for social reasons (i.e. unready for responsibility, can't afford the baby, concern over how baby would change her life, etc) as opposed to issues regarding the mother's health, the baby's health, rape or incest. These few facts are very alarming for us as Orthodox Christians who hold all life as sacred and holy.

The teens of our archdiocese are very concerned about this issue and desire to do whatever is in their ability to help bring about change that leads to godliness and holiness. The members of the North American Council (NAC) of SOYO, with the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan Philip, are leading our Archdiocese in observing Sunday, January 21, 2007, as the "**Sacred Gift of Life Sunday: Protecting the Life of the Unborn**". Our teens, as part of the celebration of January as Orthodox Education Month, are furthering their education, understanding and commitment regarding the

Orthodox Church's teaching on the sacred gift of life and abortion. In turn, they are helping to bring a greater awareness to the faithful of our parishes and throughout their local communities.

The teens are putting together a list of readings for further study are available on the Teen SOYO website. In addition, the teens are researching the various Orthodox agencies that support alternatives to abortions. A list of these agencies and links to their websites may also be found on the Teen SOYO website. Various resources will be posted to the Teen SOYO website that will further our education and understanding.

Local Teen SOYO chapters and High School Christian Education classes are encouraged to check out our resources page for materials. Some of the materials include a case study on abortion and the sacred gift of life that was developed by Dr. H. Tristram Engelhardt, an Orthodox Christian and leading Bio-Ethicist. The teens, under the leadership of the pastors and advisors, will have the material necessary to have discussions and further their belief and commitment to the sacred gift of life.

Please join our teens as we recognized the sacred gift of life on Sunday, January 21, 2007 throughout the parishes of the Antiochian Archdiocese.

Websites of Orthodox Life-Affirming Ministries:

The Treehouse www.wichitatreehouse.org

A ministry in Wichita, Kansas that offers help to women who are abortion minded. The Treehouse seeks to transform the lives of mothers and children with God's love and genuine personal care.

Zoe for Life www.zoeforlifeonline.org

A ministry that helps women who need emotional and spiritual support during crisis pregnancies; to provide confidential access to existing professional agencies; to connect interested women with potential adoptive Orthodox Christian families.

Orthodox Christians for Life www.oclife.org

This ministry of Orthodox Christians aims and goals are to present and support the position of the Orthodox Church on matters of the sanctity of innocent human life by initiating and encouraging education and action. They also serve as a clearing house for information regarding sanctity of life issues.

From the Pastor's Desk

In the November newsletter, I announced a new outreach program for our parish: The St Raphael Project. The project is named for the patron of Orthodox evangelism in this country, St Raphael Hawaweeny. The main focus of this project will be two events. These events will be held on the weekends of April 20-22, 2007 and October 5-7, 2006 and they will be designed to introduce people to Christ Jesus in and through the Holy Orthodox Faith.

We will be giving you more specific information about these events as the dates get closer, but we have already started preparing for them—and the main way we have been doing that is through prayer.

In the November newsletter, we published a prayer page, and we asked you to write down on that page the names of those people that you would like to see at one of those events. I have been encouraging you to keep those pages in your icon corner and to bring those pages with you to Great Vespers and the Divine Liturgy on the weekend. But now, we are going to take a new step in our prayer preparations.

Please make a copy of your prayer page—with all the names on it—and bring it with you to church by Sunday, January 14. We are going to put all those copies together in one book, and we are going to ask folks to volunteer for the opportunity to pray through that book at each and every liturgy. That way our personal prayers will also become our community's prayers.

For several months now, I have been praying that we will have forty new people at each of those events. I hope you will join me and St Raphael in that prayer, and I hope you will bring a copy of your prayer page to church so that we can include it in our book. The people of Central Texas need to know Christ Jesus, and they need to know Him in and through the Holy Orthodox Faith. We can help them with that process, but it all begins with our prayers—so let's be faithful, and let's continue to dedicate ourselves to this important project.

your unworthy priest
Aidan +

Building Committee Progress Report

As we begin a new year, the committee wants to keep you updated as to the progress of our project. First, let's glance at a snapshot of the big picture: At this point, we plan to break ground in summer-fall of 2008 on a multi-use facility that will cost \$700,000-\$800,000. This will require that we assume a mortgage of at least \$2,500 a month in 2008--and this brings us to our first new development for the new year! Beginning this month, we will begin transferring an increasing monthly amount from our general fund to our building fund in order to acclimate ourselves, over time, to that mortgage payment. Consequently, when we are ready to actually take on the mortgage, we should be well-prepared to handle the additional responsibility.

Also, this spring, we will begin working with a civil engineer and meeting with the City of Cedar Park; we will also locate an architect. All of this will result in a site plan, a building design, and construction drawings. The actual site plan and construction drawings will require that the committee get extensive input from everyone in the community, so be watching for opportunities to get involved with that process.

Of course, it is important that we remember to give generously. Our capital campaign fund continues to grow, but the more money we contribute to the process, the quicker we will be able to realize our goal of a new building that will glorify the Most Holy Trinity and enable us to reach out more effectively to the people of Central Texas.

Finally, as always, if you have any questions or suggestions, please get in touch with any of the members of the committee—they will be more than happy to visit with you about the project. The members are Father Deacon Basil Long, Bob Bennett, Vera Poe, and Rob and Becky Thurner.



Food For the Kingdom



In January we are entering into a period of feasting and celebration after the Nativity that is similar to the celebration of Pentecost season after Pascha. This period continues until February 2, the Presentation of the Lord. Here are some of our favorite ethnic dishes that have been served to us by Orthodox Christians from other nations.

Pastitsio - Greek Meat and Macaroni Pie

INGREDIENTS

- › 1 lb thick macaroni or Ziti style pasta
- › 1 lb minced meat
- › 3 eggs
- › $\frac{1}{2}$ cup grated kefalopasta or Parmesan cheese
- › 100 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil
- › 1 medium sized onion
- › 1 lb ripe tomatoes
- › 1 portion béchamel sauce
- › salt
- › pepper

DIRECTIONS:

1. Partially cook the macaroni in salted water and drain well.
2. Put in a baking dish and pour half of the butter over the macaroni.
3. Beat the egg whites and mix in the macaroni. Keep the yolks. They will be used to make the bechamel sauce. Sprinkle with half of the cheese.
4. With the remaining butter brown the minced meat and the onion.
5. Add the strained tomatoes or the tomato paste, salt, pepper and simmer until liquid is absorbed.
6. Remove from the heat and add the remaining grated cheese. Stir all well.
7. Prepare the béchamel sauce.
8. Butter a baking dish. Lay half of the macaroni in the pan. Spread evenly with the meat mixture. Lay the rest of the macaroni on top.
9. Make your favorite Bechamel sauce [If you don't have one, it is a very basic sauce found in any basic beginners cookbook.] Pour the bechamel sauce over them and sprinkle with grated cheese and some melted butter. Bake in a moderate oven (375F) until bechamel gets brown (40 - 45 minutes).

Kibbe Saniyeh (in pan):

Ingredients:

Bulgar Mixture:

1 1/4 lb. ground beef
1 1/4 cup #2 bulghur
1 onion (grated)
1 tsp. salt
black pepper
cinnamon
paprika

Directions for Bulgar Mixture:

1. Wash and drain bulghur, let sit for 35 minutes.
2. Mix above ingredients together.
3. Work with hands and rub together until bulghur is soft. Set aside

Kibbe Filling Mixture:

1/4 cup pine nuts
1 lb. ground beef
1 small onion (chopped)
salt and pepper
cinnamon
paprika
clarified butter

Directions for Kibbe Filling mixture:

- 1) Brown pine nuts in clarified butter. Remove pine nuts.
- 2) Brown ground beef, add onion and spices. Sauté until onion is soft and beef is cooked

To assemble full dish:

- 1) Grease edged pan with 2 tbs. oil.
- 2) Spread 1/2 bulghur mixture in bottom.
- 3) Add Kibbe filling mixture, spread evenly.
- 4) Cover with remaining bulghur mixture. Cut through in blocks. Edge along sides.
- 5) Bake 35 - 40 minutes @ 375. Brush with melted butter when taken from oven.

This is nice with a yogurt-cucumber sauce.

Annual Parish
Meeting
February 11,
2007



Don't forget to turn in your
Parish Stewardship Cards to
be able to vote at the
meeting

St. John's Community News

Special Services:

January 1 - Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Orthros 8am Liturgy 10am

Friday - January 5th - Paramon of Theophany: Bishop Basil at ST EPHREM THE SYRIAN IN SAN ANTONIO Evening Hierarchical Vespers Divine Liturgy of St Basil the Great with the 1st Sanctification of the Water

Saturday - January 6th - Theophany: Bishop Basil at PROPHET ELIAS IN AUSTIN Morning Festal Orthros and Hierarchical Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom with the 2nd Sanctification of the Water 1:00PM Out-of-Doors Blessing of the Water at Barton Springs & Luncheon

Saturday - January 6th - Theophany: Bishop Basil at ST SOPHIA IN DRIPPING SPRINGS Hierarchical Evening Great Vespers for the Synaxis of the Forerunner

Sunday - January 7th - Synaxis of the Forerunner Bishop Basil at ST JOHN THE FORERUNNER IN CEDAR PARK Morning Festal Orthros 8 am and Hierarchical Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom 10 am. To be followed by a Festive Pot-Luck Lunch.

Up-Coming Events & Announcements:

Fasting Guidelines: No daily fasting from Dec. 25 through Jan. 4

Library books: Remember all Library books are due the first Sunday of the month. Please bring your book in for renewal if necessary. Orthodox Book donations are always welcome, come and look at some of our new arrivals.

THANKS to those who participated in the Parish Clean-up Saturday, December 16. These volunteers diligently cleaned the windows, kitchen, cleaned out the gutters, mowed the grass, and trimmed the trees in order to have the Church in top condition for the celebrating of the Nativity of Our Lord. Many thanks to Janet Bennett and her team of volunteers.

The mission congregation in San Antonio, TX has requested -- and it has been blessed -- that its name be changed from "St Michael the Archangel" to **ST EPHREM THE SYRIAN**. (You may remember that the name "St Michael the Archangel" authentically belongs to the Orthodox military chaplaincy on nearby Lackland Air Force Base.)

PRAYER LIST:

Pray for the Catechumenate: Carol Lockett, Yvonne Hyma, Katrina Barnard, William Barnard, Gregory Parsons, Kevin Shaw, David Jenks, Mary Anne Harding, the Easley family [Gregg, Gayla, Evan, Kate, and Grace], and Rigel Thurson.

Pray for the Health of Body and Soul of those who have requested your prayers: Nun SERAPHIMA Crammer Landon Lockett, NADIA Onjanow, Teresa ANNA Sisko, Hannah NICHOLE Montgomery, MARY Laverne Hollapeter, the Thomas Family, Aidan Milnor grandson of Fr. John Henderson, and those who serve in the Armed Forces .

Remember in your God-pleasing prayers FATHER MARK SAHADY, chaplain with the USAir Force, who has been deployed to the Middle East. Also keep in your prayers KHOURIYA BARBARA and the three Sahady children: ELIZABETH, ANTHONY and JOHN.

Prayers requested for the repose of the newly departed Priest Georg Calciu-Dunitreasa, newly reposed servant of God Adnan Yacoub, the infant Ian William Montgomery, and the handmaiden of God Malinda Brown.

Happy Birthday: January 24 Jerry MICHAEL Benson, January 31 Sariah MICHAL Wilson

Happy Anniversary : January 6 Jerry MICHAEL and MARGARET Benson

Congratulations On the Marriage of Baker MICHAEL and REBEKAH Galloway. The Galloways were married at Holy Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church in Austin on December 30, 2006. The Galloways are members of St. John the Forerunner Antiochian Orthodox Church in Cedar Park, Texas.

Welcome to Rebekah Galloway nee Johns who was chrismated into the Holy Orthodox Church in November. Rebekah is a school teacher and was married to Baker MICHAEL Galloway in December.

Welcome to Rigel Thurson who entered the catechumenate of the Holy Orthodox Church in December.

May God grant you many years!

Is your special date missing here? Please let Subdeacon Thomas know. Our data base crashed and we do not have family information anymore and are working off past issues of the Newsletter only. Help us to celebrate and pray for you on your special days.

BISHOP BASIL ENDOWMENT FUND

Honor our beloved Bishop BASIL on his name day, the Feast of St. Basil the Great, January 1, with a gift to the BISHOP BASIL MISSIONS ENDOWMENT FUND that he established to assist in establishing and maintaining missions within the Diocese of Wichita and Mid America. St. John the Forerunner Mission received assistance from this fund before we became a parish. Please make your checks to "Bishop BASIL Missions Endowment Fund" and send them with your greeting or put it in the Collection Tray. Please take this opportunity to honor Bishop Basil on his Name Day.

It is not too early to start thinking about Camp Raphael for Summer of 2007

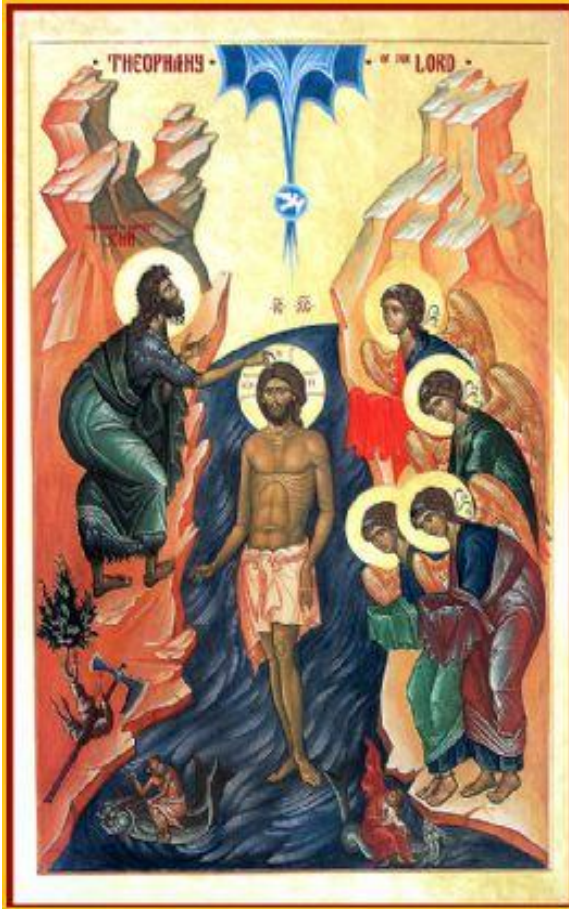
Location: YMCA Camp Takatoka near Tulsa, Oklahoma

Dates: Session 1: June 24-30, 2007
Session 2: July 1-7, 2007

Camp Director: **Fr. James Shadid**,

Executive Director: **Gayle Malone**

Website: **<http://www.campstraphael.org/>**



*Theophany Blessing
of the
Waters*

At Barton Springs

*with His Grace
Bishop BASIL
of
Wichita and Mid
America*

*Saturday
January 6, 2007
12:30 pm*

We need some men, women, and teenage youths to dive for the Holy Cross.

Wear your swimsuit and / or wetsuit to dive for the cross after the waters are blessed

*The Blessing will take place at
Barton Springs in Zilker Park*

THE ORTHOX KIDS PAGE

The Baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ



There once was a man named John the Forerunner, who actually was one of Jesus cousins. He is called the forerunner because he came before Jesus to tell the people that Jesus was coming and to have them ask for forgiveness for things they had done wrong. He wanted to help others change their lives so they could become like a brand new person inside.

He was doing this not to be better than Jesus, but to help Jesus. He called the people to Repent [this means to feel bad for their mistakes and to ask God for forgiveness]. John knew that by teaching the people that they needed God in their life he was preparing the people to hear from Jesus himself.

John was a man who lives a very simple life. He felt that having a lot of things wasn't important, instead he traveled the desert and told others about what good things God was doing in his life, and how God could do good things in their life too.

John didn't go to a big house every night to go home to. He did not eat a big dinner but fed on locusts (grasshoppers) and honey. He did not sleep in a nice comfortable bed like you and I do. John slept outside. He wore a coat of goat's hair to clothe himself. John wanted to live a simple life, he felt like God was all he needed. Nothing else was more important.

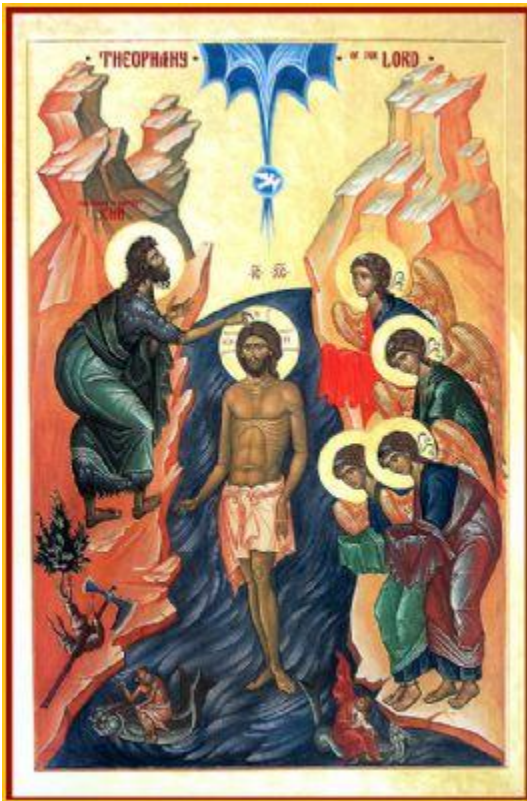
When people heard that John was in the area they would come from all over to listen to him and get baptized. Baptism is like having a bath to make yourself clean inside. When a person gets baptized it is a sign that they believe in God and want to live their life the way God wants them to live it. A person when they are baptized are saying that they understand that they belong to God and will ask him for forgiveness when the need to do so.

When some men named the Pharisees and Sadducees came to listen to John he had a strict warning for them. They needed to feel bad for the wrong things they had done and ask forgiveness for their mistakes. But these men didn't think they were doing anything wrong, they weren't sorry, so John would not baptize them.

As people were coming to John to be baptized, they were wondering if he was the Savior they had waited for. John heard what they were saying and he told them, "I am baptizing you now, but very soon someone greater than me will come. He is so great that if He asked me to carry His shoes it would be more than I should do for I am not worthy of such an honor ."

John continued to preach and baptize people until one day Jesus came by to be baptized. John didn't know what to say, all he knew was that how could he, just an ordinary person baptize Jesus the Savior of the world.

John said to Jesus, "You should be baptizing me, I cannot baptize you Lord." Jesus replied, "It's important that I do this now, I am ready and I want to be an example to others and show them that it's important."



So John took Jesus and baptized Him. He placed his hand on His back and laid him down into the water till He was covered and brought Him back up again. And just as soon as Jesus was baptized the sky opened up and the Holy Spirit came like a beautiful white dove to Jesus. Then a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, I love him and I am pleased with him."

Just like when Jesus died, was buried and rose again, baptism is just like that. When we lay down into the water we are dying or getting rid of all the bad things we've done. Under the water we are buried, and then when we are brought out of the water we are a brand new person to God.

Baptism is important because Jesus made sure this was the first thing He did when He started His ministry. It is also the last thing He said before going up to heaven, He said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you..." Matthew 28:19,20

In the Orthodox Church, many of you were baptized as babies because your mothers and fathers wanted to make sure that you could have the Holy Spirit as Jesus did at his baptism. Older children and adults, who were not baptized as babies, are baptized when they become an Orthodox Christian so they too may have the Holy Spirit to guide them. The Holy Spirit is there to call us, as did John the Forerunner, to repentance and confession so that we may become clean and holy to God.

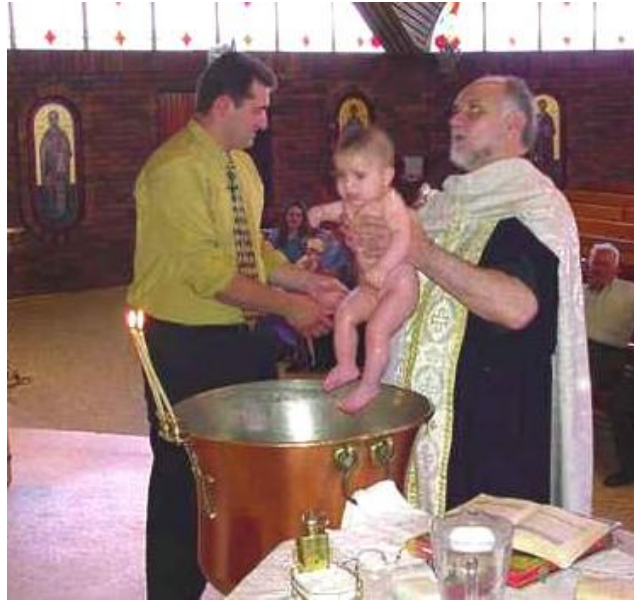


Photo courtesy of The Greek Orthodox Parish-Community of the Dormition of the Theotokos, Mt. Gravatt, Queensland, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia

Family Activities:

1. Have your children prepare containers for Holy Water to take Liturgy the day of the feast. Plastic or glass containers (with lids) should be washed thoroughly, the containers may then be decorated on the outside. A cross or small Theophany icon may be attached with rubber cement.
2. With parents' guidance, children should prepare their rooms for blessing and select one personal possession to be blessed as well: a new icon for their room, a baseball glove for an avid player, etc. Assure your pets are not underfoot when father visits.
3. Hold a dress rehearsal in preparation for the priest's visit to bless your home and practice singing the Troparion used during the house blessing "When You were Baptized in the Jordan..."
4. Get a copy of the Icon of the Theophany of the Lord and enshrine it on your family altar or icon corner. Sing the Troparion before it everyday of the feast and after-feast.