



# The Meaning of the Feast of Theophany

# Prayer Before Reading Scripture

Shine within our hearts, loving Master, the pure light of Your divine knowledge and open the eyes of our minds that we may comprehend the message of Your Gospel. Instill in us also reverence for Your blessed commandments, so that having conquered all sinful desires, we may pursue a spiritual life, thinking and doing all those things that are pleasing to You. For You, Christ our God, are the light of our souls and bodies, and to You we give glory together with Your Father who is without beginning and Your all holy, good, and life giving Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.



# Matthew 3.13-17

At that time, Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

# Titus 3.4-7

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

# Liturgical Context: the Feast

Τὰ Ἅγια Θεοφάνεια  
τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν  
Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

*The Holy Manifestation  
Of our Lord and God and Savior  
Jesus Christ*



***Many celebrate the feast days and know their designations, but the cause for which they were established they know not. Thus concerning this, everyone knows that the present feast is called Theophany; but what this is, 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 meaning.***

St. John Chrysostom,

*Discourse on the Day of the Baptism of Christ*



# What Theophany Commemorates

1. Baptism of Christ and our baptism



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1. Baptism of Christ and our baptism
2. Enlightenment, Illumination (Feast of Lights)
3. Revelation of Jesus as the Christ
4. Revelation that God is Three Persons (Trinity)



# Patristic Names for Baptism

(St. Gregory the Theologian, Oration 40, IV)

- We call it **the Gift**, because it is given to us in return for nothing on our part;
- **Grace**, because it is conferred even on debtors;
- **Baptism**, because sin is buried with it in the water;
- **Unction**, as Priestly and Royal, for such were they who were anointed;
- **Illumination**, because of its splendour;
- **Clothing**, because it hides our shame;



**Born of water—  
the Significance of Water**



# The Cosmic Nature of Water

(Fr. Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God*)

- “Man...is reborn as much from Spirit as from cosmic matter, inasmuch as the water represents this matter in a liquid state, as a reservoir and womb for every form of organized existence.
- Baptism has a cosmic significance. It means that matter itself, brought back to the condition of spiritual mobility, becomes a milieu for the creator Spirit, who is free and ever new in all His acts.
- The water of baptism is, in a hidden way, the matter of the age to come that will bear within itself the Son as resplendent hypostasis and the Spirit with His life-giving and ever-new energies. But this water has now been made spiritual for the sake of human rebirth and the reestablishment of humanity’s relationship with God.”



# The Ambiguity of Water

(Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*)

- “...water reflects and symbolizes the world as cosmos and life....”
- “...it is also the symbol of destruction and death. It is the mysterious depth which kills and annihilates, the dark habitation of the demonic powers, the very image of the irrational, uncontrollable, elemental in the world....”
- It “...is the principle of purification, of cleanliness, and therefore of regeneration and renewal. It washes away stains, it re-creates the pristine purity of the earth.”



# **What the New Testament Teaches About the Baptism of Christ**





In those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up from the water, he saw the heavens parting and the **Spirit** descending on him like a dove. **A voice** came out of the sky, “You are my beloved **Son**, in whom I am well pleased.”

*Mark 1.9-11*



# Why Was Christ Baptized?



Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan† to John, to be baptized by him. But John would have hindered him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?” But Jesus, answering, said to him, “**Allow it now, for this is the fitting way for us to fulfill all righteousness.**” Then he allowed him.

Jesus, when he was baptized, went up directly from the water: and behold, the heavens were opened to him. He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming on him. Behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

*Mat 3.13-17*



# The Cosmic Nature of Water

(Fr. Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God*)

Although the incarnate Son of God had no need of...rebirth through baptism, for He was born of the Spirit from the beginning, **He accepted baptism for our sake so that**, in this regard as well, **He might be the first human being to be baptized in water and the Spirit**. By doing so, in a concrete way He united the Spirit within Him to the water, as womb and sustainer of life, a life now no longer subjected to death because of its complete union with the Spirit.



# The Cosmic Nature of Water

(Fr. Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God*)

In this way Christ fulfilled all righteousness" (Matt 3:15), the righteousness with which He was to clothe anew all those who put their faith in Him. He accepted both of these acts in succession because we have to pass through both ourselves. For this reason **the Fathers see baptism as based in both the birth and the baptism of the Lord. The baptismal font is for them an image both of the womb of the Mother of the Lord and of the River Jordan.**



# Why Was Christ Baptized?



John "...saw Jesus coming to him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who is preferred before me, for he was before me.' I didn't know him, but **for this reason I came baptizing in water: that he would be revealed to Israel.**" John testified, saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending like a dove out of heaven, and it remained on him. I didn't recognize him, but he who sent me to baptize in water said to me, '**On whomever you will see the Spirit descending and remaining on him is he who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.**' I have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

*John 1.26-34*



# Our Baptism



***As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. Alleluia.***

Traditional Eastern Orthodox Christian Hymn  
Sung in place of the Thrice-Holy Hymn  
on the Feasts of the Lord.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? May it never be! We who died to sin, how could we live in it any longer? Or **don't you know that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.** For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we will also be part of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be in bondage to sin.

*Rom 6.1-7*



**What  
Iconography  
and Hymnography  
Teach About  
the Baptism of Christ**



**The Son is  
baptized...**

**The Father  
speaks...**

**The Spirit  
descends...**



**Christ is  
revealed**

When the shining vaults of heaven were opened, he who knew the mysteries saw the Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and rests on the immaculate Word, descending in ways past speech in the form of a dove: and he commanded the multitudes to hasten to the Master.  
(Theophany, Ode 6, Canon 2, Troparion 2)



**.the sea saw and fled, the Jordan turned back. Ps 114.3**



Jordan River, tell us do: What did you see and were amazed? I saw naked Him whom none can see, and shuddered in fear. And how was I not to shudder at Him and be frightened? The Angels, when they saw Him also shuddered in awe. And heaven was astonished, and astounded was earth. The sea recoiled along with all things both visible and invisible. For Christ appeared in the River Jordan, to sanctify the waters.

**A Kathisma of Theophany**



# Christ is Blessing the Waters of the Jordan



When the light of Dawn shone on mortal men, he came from the desert to the streams of the Jordan. You, the Sun's King, bowed Your head before him, to snatch our forefather from the land of darkness, and ***cleanse creation from pollution.***

(Theophany, Ode 1, Canon 2)



# Christ is Blessing the Waters of the Jordan



He is Jesus, the Author of life. He has come to loose the condemnation of first- created Adam. Being God, and thus not needing to be purified, in the Jordan He ***purifies the one who had fallen***. He put to death the enmity, and therefore He grants the peace that passes all understanding.

(Theophany, Ode 5, Canon 1)



# Christ is Blessing the Waters of the Jordan



Let us run in piety and eagerness to the undefiled fountains of the stream of salvation, and let us look upon the Word who gives us to drink from pure waters that satisfy our holy thirst: He gently heals the disease of the world.

(Theophany, Ode 3, Canon 2)



# Dragons in the Jordan      Job 40.23



Theophany, Ode 4, Canon 2

In the lairs of dragons,  
God the Word  
searches for us to  
lead us back to the  
life- giving pastures of  
Paradise. He destroys  
the dreadful snares  
the enemy had laid for  
mankind, He makes a  
prisoner of him who  
bruised all mankind in  
the heel, and so He  
saves the creation.



# **The Jordan River in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism**



# In the Service of Holy Baptism, the Priest Prays...

**You hallowed the streams of Jordan**, sending down from the Heavens Your Holy Spirit, and crushed the heads of dragons that lurked therein.

Do You yourself, O loving King, be present now also through the descent of Your Holy Spirit and hallow this water.

And **give to it** the Grace of Redemption, **the Blessing of Jordan**. Make it a fountain of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a loosing of sins, a healing of sicknesses, a destruction of demons, unapproachable by hostile powers, filled with angelic might; and let them that take counsel together against Your creature flee there from, for I have called upon Your Name, O Lord, which is wonderful, and glorious, and terrible unto adversaries.



# Summary

1. Christ's Baptism and the feast of Theophany have rich theological meaning.
2. We should study the Canons (Hymns) of Theophany to see what they teach about the significance of Christ's baptism.
3. We should also study the New Testament passages on baptism and the sacrament of Baptism.



Questions?  
Comments?