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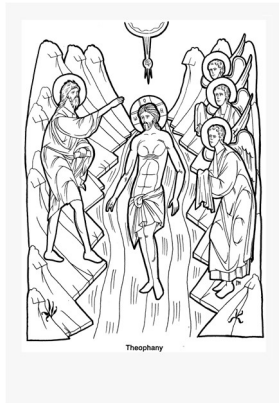
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that the Lord was baptized, not because He Himself had need for cleansing, but “to bury human sin by water,” to fulfill the Law, to reveal the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and finally, to sanctify “the nature of water” and to offer us the form and 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).

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What is a House Blessing?

During the weeks following the Feast of Theophany (The appearance of the Holy Trinity at Christ's Baptism - Celebrated January 6th), it is customary for the parish priest to visit the homes of his parishioners, bringing Holy Water from the Great Sanctification of the Waters, performed in church on Theophany, for the traditional Theophany House Blessing. The blessing asks the Lord to grant peace, health, salvation and protection to the home and the family residing in it.

How do I prepare?

Make sure your family will be home for the Blessing, the more the better! In anticipation of the arrival of the priest, prepare a small table, placing a white tablecloth on it and setting it up against an eastern facing wall in the home's main room. On the table, place an icon(s) on a stand(s), and a candle. Also, place a small bowl about half full of cold water (to which the priest will add Holy Water) along with several sprigs of basil or evergreen bound together with a ribbon.

Upon his arrival, Father will greet the whole family and begin the blessing service. Lights should be turned on in all the rooms of the house that are to be blessed.

When it is time for the house to be blessed, Father, along with the family, will process through the entire home singing. Children are encouraged to run ahead and open doors, turn on lights, etc. **Please turn off all TVs and radios ahead of time.**

Note: It has become customary to give the priest a monetary “gift of love,” when the house is blessed; this is not a requirement. It does not cost anything to have your house blessed - your priest is available to you free of charge whenever you need him. If you still feel compelled to do this, you may do so in the envelope provided in today's bulletin. Fr. Richard will put any of these donations toward a particular project in St. Mary's.

Regarding meals, please do not prepare a full meal for the priest unless you have arranged ahead of time for him to stay. There will be time after the blessing for a

glass of water or tea, to talk and catch up, however, Fr. Richard has many homes to bless and may not have the availability to stay for a full meal.



For those who are being extra cautious...

If you're at-risk and would still like your home blessed, please enter your information on the enclosed envelope and Father will come bless your front door and leave a Holy Card and a small bottle of Holy Water for you in your mailbox. Fr. Richard will do his best to have this done by mid-February.

I look forward to visiting your home!

WHAT IS THEOPHANY?

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.

Theophany is a Greek word which means a manifestation or revelation of God. In the Western Church the same Feast is often called Epiphany, meaning manifestation or revelation, and the emphasis is not on the Baptism of Christ, rather it is on the revelation of Christ to the Gentile people

when the three wise men came to visit the newborn Christ. In either case, the revelation of God to the world is what is celebrated on this feast.

Historically speaking, the Feast was the “original Christmas,” since all the events of Christ manifesting Himself as God were celebrated together on this day. These events were His Baptism, the list of the Wise Men, the Transfiguration, etc. where He showed Himself to be God. And, of course, His manifestation in the flesh in His holy Birth. Therefore, Christmas was originally celebrated together on this day with the other events mentioned. Towards the end of the 4th century, the various events in the earthly life of our Lord began to be separated from the original Feast and given their own day on the Christian calendar. The Nativity of our Lord was the first to be separated and was assigned to be celebrated 12 days earlier. However, the celebratory customs still remained with Theophany. Therefore, it is sometimes referred to as “Little Christmas.” Among our Ukrainian people, Theophany is celebrated in the same manner as Christmas, with carols and even a second Holy Supper on Theophany Eve.

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.

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