



## Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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### *On the Baptism of Our Lord* Week of January 18, 2015

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

**Christ is baptized! In the Jordan!**

*He who covers the heaven with clouds is Himself covered today by the streams of Jordan; and He who takes away the sin of the world is cleansed, that I may be made clean. The Only-begotten Son of the Most High Father receives from above the testimony of the consubstantial Spirit. Unto Him let us cry aloud: O Christ our God who hast made Thyself manifest and saved us, glory to Thee. (From the Stichera of Lauds in the Matins of Holy Theophany)*

Each year throughout the world Orthodox Christians celebrate the event recorded by the Holy Gospels of our Lord's Baptism in the River Jordan by John the Forerunner and Baptizer. The ancient name for this Feast is *Epiphany*, which means "revelation." It is called this, because at the time of His Baptism the Spirit descended upon our Lord in the form of a dove and the voice of the Father spoke audibly saying, "This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased!" For Orthodox Christians this Epiphany or revelation bears the further truth that He, the Lord Jesus Christ, is indeed God in human flesh. For that reason we also call this great feast "Theophany" or "the revelation of God" in the human flesh and blood of our Savior.

The double meaning of the feast for us is clear. First, it is not the feast of our Lord's purification or of the forgiveness of His sin, for truly He is pure from eternity and truly He has no sin of which to be forgiven. Rather it is the feast of our Lord purifying that to which He is joined. Rather than the waters purifying

Him, He purifies the waters. By descending into the filthy waters of this world tainted by the lust of sin, He purifies the world; the waters of the Jordan become waters of healing and life, since He enters them. When the priest prays the prayers of the *Great Blessing of Waters*, the Spirit descends into the water over which he prays, and the water therein becomes Holy Water. The Faithful partake of it, sprinkle it, use it for healing and purification and cherish it as a sign and true symbol of the Lord's presence, without which life is as barren as the desert.

But there is a second meaning of this feast as well. The message this feast so clearly proclaims is that Christ came into the world in obedience to the Father with the life-renewing grace and power of the Holy Spirit to save sinners. He descends into our darkness to fill it with His light; He becomes one of us in all of our carnality so that we might become like Him in His divine goodness and mercy and love. There is no length to which the Father will not go to save us, even though it means the self-giving of His Only-Begotten Son on the cross as sacrifice for our sin. The greatness of this feast is truly wondrous! As a sign and remembrance we take the Holy Water with us and use it in our everyday lives in the world. Truly it is a remembrance of our own Baptisms, when we were taken out of time and purified, the sins of our past, present and future forgiven. Glory to God!

It is the case that so many people in the world do not realize the value of this feast, because they do not understand the seriousness of their sin. We cannot appreciate what we are offered if we do not realize our need for it. But if we face the truth and see the sin nestled within our hearts, then the self-giving of the Savior Who unites Himself with a world sick with sin is truly wondrous. As St. Paul said, *Christ died for us while we were yet sinners*. The One Who is All Pure cleanses the waters of the Jordan so that the filth of our sin is truly washed away.

This, Brothers and Sisters, is the feast we have just celebrated. We will partake of the Holy Water this Sunday once again, and we will take it home in bottles to sanctify and renew us there as well. And we will turn our attention beginning next Sunday to the necessary and wondrous theme of our great need for what He offers. For Triodion is upon us, and the Great Fast is soon about to begin again. Glory to God!

**Remember what the LORD has done for you! Give Him thanks and praise! *Glory to His NAME for all things!*** Pray for me, His most unworthy of priests.

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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