

## ***THE TRUE SIGNIFICANCE OF THEOPHANY***

Theophany is one of the greatest and oldest feasts in the Orthodox Church. Indeed, its celebration pre-dates the observance of our Lord's Nativity by several centuries. Through the years, much significance has been attached to this holy day. It is the commemoration of Christ's Baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist. Through lengthy prayers and elaborate ritual, water is blessed on this feast. The custom of blessing homes has long been part of this solemn day.

Through the priest's solemn prayers, we rededicate our homes to their original purpose: to be a place where a family is guided along the path of righteousness by Jesus Christ. Since this is the time in our Church Year when we remember the coming of Christ and the beginning of His ministry when He descended into the Jordan to be baptized by St. John the Forerunner, it is fitting that the Lord enters our homes and our hearts now. It reminds us that we must *"repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand."* (Matthew 4: 1 7) Orthodox Christians must remember that all things must be done for the glory of the Lord. This is why our homes, where we spend much of our quality, family time, must be blessed and sanctified on a regular basis, enabling us to fight off Satan's temptations.

While these are all important aspects of our celebration of Theophany, the real significance of this day can be found in the meaning of the feast's name:

**THEOPHANY -- GOD MADE MANIFEST.** At the Baptism of Christ, the Holy Trinity was clearly revealed and bore witness to our Savior's Divinity. The Presence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit were all felt in the waters of the Jordan. In the 3rd Hour of the Vigil for the feast, we read: **THE TRINITY -- OUR GOD -- REVEALED HIMSELF TO US TODAY AS FREE FROM DIVISION: FOR THE FATHER UTTERED THE CLEAR TESTIMONY TO HIS SON, THE SPIRIT DESCENDED FROM HEAVEN IN THE FORM OF A DOVE AND THE SON BOWED HIS PURE HEAD TO THE FORERUNNER, SO THAT BEING BAPTIZED, HE COULD SAVE US FROM BONDAGE.** All four Evangelists confirm this Divine Manifestation in their sacred writings. Our Orthodox Christian belief in the Holy Trinity is one of our most profound and sacred doctrines. May the celebration of Theophany always remind us of our need to invoke the Father, Son and Holy Spirit every time we pause to pray.

Following the *Great Blessing of Water* on this Feast, it is customary for the parish priest to visit the homes of his faithful, bringing with him the *"blessings of the Jordan."*

The prescribed prayer when our homes are blessed at Theophany wonderfully captures the importance of this annual ritual:

***"O God our Savior, the True Light, Who was baptized in the Jordan by John and Who deigned to enter under the roof of Zacchaeus, bringing salvation to him and his house: do You, the same Lord, keep safe also from harm those who live here; grant to them Your blessing, purification and bodily health, and all their petitions that are unto salvation and life everlasting."***