



Why dost thou turn back thy waters, O Jordan? Why dost thou stop thy streams, and why dost thou not proceed upon thy natural course? 'I cannot bear', said he, 'the Fire that consumes me. I am filled with wonder and with dread before His extreme condescension. For I am not used to wash him that is clean: I have not learnt to bathe the sinless, but to purge filthy vessels. Christ who is baptized in me teaches me to burn the thorns of sin. John, the voice of the Word, bears witness with me and cries: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Unto Him let us the faithful cry aloud: O God who art made manifest for our salvation, glory to thee.

From the Sixth hour of the Forefeast

**Sunday 6 December 2013 is the Theophany of Our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ**

**Matins Gospel:** Mark 1:9-11

**Epistle:** Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

**Gospel:** Matthew 3:13-17

**Apolytikion:**

As You were baptized in the Jordan, Lord, the voice of the Trinity was made manifest: for the voice of the Father bore witness to You, naming You the Beloved Son; and the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the sureness of the word. Christ our God, who appeared and enlightened the world, glory to You.

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### **Readings and saints for this week:**

**Monday:** Acts 19:1-8; John 1:29-34

Synaxis of John the Forerunner; Afterfeast of the Theophany

**Tuesday:** Romans 6:3-11; John 3:22-33

George of Hozeva; Dominica the Righteous

**Wednesday:** 2 Timothy 2:1-10; Mark 1:9-15

Martyr Polyeuctus; Eustratios the Wonderworker

**Thursday:** Ephesians 4:7-13; Luke 3:19-22

Gregory of Nyssa; Dometian, Bishop of Melitene; Theosebia the Deaconess

**Friday:** Hebrews 13:7-16; Matthew 11:27-30

Theodosius the Cenobiarch; Vitalis of Gaza

**Saturday:** 2 Timothy 2:1-10; John 10:39-42

Martyr Tatiana; Martyr Mertios



Archbishopric of Good Hope,  
Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

## *Evangelion*

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### **The Baptism of the Lord**

Today we celebrate the great feast of the Theophany of Our Lord Jesus Christ. This feast, on which we commemorate Christ's baptism by Saint John the Baptist in the River Jordan, marks the public manifestation of Jesus Christ and the beginning of His ministry. In the Nativity we celebrated the Incarnation of Christ and His coming among us. In His Theophany (sometimes called Epiphany), His true identity is revealed and His glory shines forth for all the world to see.

Saint John the Baptist was in the desert preaching a baptism of repentance. We might wonder, as Saint John himself wondered, why the Sinless One would need to be baptized. Yet Jesus insisted that this was necessary and, in submitting to this baptism, He revealed the very depths of His humility. Not only has He taken on our human flesh in the Incarnation, but in His baptism he identifies Himself with sinful humanity, entering into the depths of our brokenness, in order to take our sins upon Himself and to heal us.

However, in Christ's baptism we see not only His humility, but also His glory. Somehow, His humility and His glory always go together, for the more He pours Himself out for us, the more His glory is revealed. No sooner has Jesus been baptized, than we are told that the Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove, and that a voice from heaven declared: "This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on Him." This is the public manifestation of who Jesus Christ is, the shining forth of His glory for all the world to see. It is the revelation both of the waters that will cleanse us and of the Light that will enlighten us and eventually overcome all darkness.



A strange wonder it was to see the Maker of heaven and earth stand naked in the river, and as a servant receive baptism from a servant. The choirs of angels were filled with amazement, fear and joy. Joining with them, we worship Thee: O Lord, save us .

From the Ninth Hour of the Forefeast of the Theophany

# The Icon of the Theophany of the Lord

In the icon of the Baptism of Christ, we see the Church's understanding of this event, for the icon is a reflection of the Church's faith and an invitation to us to enter into that faith in a deeper way.

We see two fundamental mysteries revealed here. There is, firstly, the revelation of the Holy Trinity who reveals Himself on this day, through the voice of the Father and through the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. And, secondly, there is the revelation of the mystery of Baptism, through which we and all creation are purified and renewed.



We see these elements expressed in the icon. At the top of the icon there is a segment of a circle which represents the heavens which had been closed by the sin of Adam, but which are now opened by Christ. This signifies the presence of God, and we see rays of light that shine upon the Saviour, together with the dove which represents the Holy Spirit who comes to rest on Him. For the Fathers of the Church, the dove is a reminder of the dove that had heralded the end of the flood (Genesis 8:11-12)

Like the icon of the Nativity, the events of this icon are also situated in the desert, representing the desert of our estrangement from God. And, just as His Nativity was situated in a cave, so too Christ is shown here in the river which forms a cave around Him, pointing to the darkness of our world and to the tomb and the depths of hell into which He will descend in order to save us.

This watery tomb evokes the imagery of water found in the Old Testament. On the one hand, water is a symbol of chaos, death and destruction, as seen in the Flood. But it is also used to express our longing for Living Water which is our longing for Christ Himself. In the icon of the baptism of Christ we often see two small figures in the water. The one is a man who represents the Jordan River which the prophet Elisha turned back with his mantle, prefiguring our baptism. And the other is a woman who represents the sea and refers to that other prefiguration of Baptism, namely the crossing of the Red Sea.

The icon shows Christ covered by the water, but He is shown as standing or walking in order to show that the initiative comes from Him. He blesses the waters of the Jordan, sanctifying them by His immersion, and from then on the water becomes an image not of death, but of new life.

Saint John the Forerunner is the one who baptizes Christ, and we see the presence of the angels, for the divine services state that "The choirs of angels were full of wonder, fear and joy."

When the Lord descended today into the waters of the Jordan, He cried aloud to John: 'Be not afraid to baptize me: for I am come to save Adam the first-formed man.'

From the First hour of the Forefeast of the Theophany

# The Great Blessing of the Water

At Theophany we celebrate the rite of the Great Blessing of the Water, which often happens both inside the Church, in which holy water is blessed for our use, and often also outside the Church, in which the waters of our surrounding environment are blessed. It begins with the chanting of special hymns and the incensing of the water, and concludes with Bible readings, petitions and prayers.

The prayers and readings all seek to manifest the meaning of this great feast, showing how all creation has longed for the coming of Christ and now rejoices in His presence.

Through the Incarnation of Christ, the Son of God has taken on human flesh and He has now manifested Himself in the River Jordan. Through this, He has sanctified all of created reality – everything is now made holy in Him. Everything that has been corrupted and polluted by our human sinfulness is cleansed and purified by the gracious work of God. The corrupting power of Satan is conquered and all that seeks to poison God's good creation is destroyed as all things are once more made new in Him.



Come, O ye faithful,  
Let us praise the greatness of God's dispensation  
toward us,  
For He who became Man because of our  
transgressions  
And who alone is clean and undefiled,  
Was for our cleansing Himself cleansed in the  
Jordan  
That He might sanctify both me and the waters...  
Let us then draw water in gladness, O Brothers,  
For upon those that draw in faith  
The grace of the Spirit is invisibly bestowed by  
Christ  
The God and Saviour of our souls.

Concluding Prayer from the Rite of Blessing



*Today the grace of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove dwelt upon the waters. Today the Sun that never sets has dawned and the world is made radiant with the light of the Lord. Today the Moon with its radiant beams sheds light on the world. Today the stars formed of light make the inhabited world lovely with the brightness of their splendour. Today the clouds rain down from heaven the shower of justice for mankind. Today the Uncreated by his own will accepts the laying on of hands by his own creature. Today the Prophet and Forerunner draws near, but stands by with fear seeing God's condescension towards us. Today the streams of Jordan are changed into healing by the presence of the Lord. Today all creation is watered by mystical streams. Today the failings of mankind are being washed away by the waters of Jordan. Today Paradise is opened for mortals and the Sun of justice shines down on us. Today the bitter water as once for Moses' people is changed to sweetness by the presence of the Lord. Today we have been delivered from the ancient grief, and saved as the new Israel. Today we have been redeemed from darkness and are filled with radiance by the light of the knowledge of God. Today the gloomy fog of the world is cleansed by the manifestation of our God. Today all creation shines with light from on high.*

From the Great Blessing of the Waters