

Service of Epiphany
Re-Catechism 4
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The Blessing of the Waters

1. The main part of the service begins with hymns:

The voice of the Lord cries over the waters, saying: Come all, receive the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of the fear of God, even Christ who is made manifest.

Today the nature of water is sanctified. Jordan is divided in two, and turns back the stream of its waters, beholding the Master being baptized.

As a man you came to that river, O Christ our King, and did hurry O Good One, to receive the baptism of a servant at the hands of the Forerunner (John), because of our sins, O Lover of Man.

2. Three readings from the Prophecy of Isaiah follow, that talk about the coming kingdom of God:

Let the thirsty wilderness be glad, let the desert rejoice, let it blossom as a rose, let it blossom abundantly, let everything rejoice ... (Isaiah 35: 1-10)

Go to that water, O you who thirst, and as many as have no money, let them eat and drink without price, both wine and fat ... (Isaiah 55:1-13)

With joy draw the water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall you say: Confess ye unto the Lord and call upon his Name; declare his glorious deeds... his Name is exalted ... Hymn the Name of the Lord ... Rejoice and exult ... (Isaiah 12:3.6).

3. Then we have the Epistle reading (*1 Corinthians 10:1-4*, “*For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.*”), and the Gospel reading (*Mark 1:9-11*, “*At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*”), followed by a special great Litany where we ask for the grace of the Holy Spirit to come upon the water and upon all those who will partake of it.

4. And it finally ends with a long series of prayers to God to sanctify the water, and all of us and all creation, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Let’s look at some of them briefly:

“Let us beseech the Lord for this water that it may be sanctified by the power and virtue and descent of the Holy Ghost. Let us beseech the Lord for this water that it may be sanctified by the power of the Holy Ghost...

For our enlightenment by the light of godliness...for the rendering of this water, a gift of sanctification, a healing of soul and body...averting of every snare of enemies. Let us beseech the Lord. Lord, have mercy...”

"O Master, we beseech Thee, sprinkle upon us Thine unworthy servants purifying water which is the gift of Thy compassion..."

"In the former festival we saw Thee as a babe, but here and now we behold Thee our perfect and manifested God, from Him Who is perfect..."

5. The Priest then continues by repeating 23 different ways of celebrating and commemorating the joyful meaning of Baptism and Epiphany. For example,

“Today, the hour of our festival has come, and the choir of the Saints assists with us, and Angels celebrate together with men. Today, the clouds refresh mankind by raining down righteousness from heaven. Today, the streams of Jordan are changed into healing waters by the presence of the Lord. Today, we are redeemed from darkness and illuminated by the light of the knowledge of God...”

"Jordan was driven back when it saw the fire of the Godhead descending in bodily form and resting upon it..."

"Great art Thou, O Lord, and marvelous are Thy works: no words suffice to praise Thy marvels..."

“O merciful King, do Thou now be present through the descent of Thy Holy Spirit, and sanctify this water...and give to it the grace of redemption, the blessing of Jordan. Make it a source of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a ransom from sins, a guard against sickness, a defense against devils, inaccessible to every adverse power, and filled with angelic strength...”

"Do thou therefore, O Master, sanctify now this water, by Thy Holy Spirit...give sanctification, blessing, cleansing, and health to all those touched, anointed, and partaking thereof..."

6. Then while the Troparion of the feast is sung, the priest immerses a Cross into the water three times and then sprinkles the water in four directions. As he does this the priest chants the Dismissal Hymn:

“When Thou, O Lord, was baptized in Jordan, the worship of the Trinity was manifested. The voice of the Father bore witness to Thee, calling Thee His Beloved Son; and the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the immutability of the words. Thou hast appeared, O Christ our God, and hast illuminated all the world; glory to Thee.”

7. He then blesses the people and the whole church building with the sanctified water, which symbolizes our salvation and the new creation that has begun, and which will be completed in Christ’s Second Coming:

“Thou hast appeared today to the world, and Thy light, O Lord, has been sealed upon us; with full knowledge we praise Thee. Thou hast come, Thou art manifested, O unapproachable Light.”

Conclusion

This is the sanctified water that we are blessed with and that we take home with us to bless everything. It is not the same as the water, which is usually blessed at the beginning of each month. The water that is blessed on the Feast of Theophany is sanctified water whose composition changes (like Holy Communion, as St John Chrysostom writes, and which is why we can keep the water for years without spoiling. This is why we fast the day before).

Epiphany is the beginning of the renewal again, where creation becomes good again and waits for the ultimate perfection of the Second Coming (Appearing) of Jesus Christ.