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Jan 4/17 2012 Two days before Theophany

Dear in Christ Brethren:

I am writing this letter on Tuesday, two days before Theophany, and a day before I visit the Michael Unit, two weeks after Innocent and John were baptized. God willing, I will see the newly illumined Vladimir in the Hughes unit next week. This is a season of baptisms. On Theophany, I will baptize four, including a married couple who are converting together, and two children.

Normally, I serve two extensive services the eve of Theophany, but I received permission from Bishop Peter to serve the morning service a day early (today), because I thought it was really important to see the newly illumined Christians as soon after their baptism as possible. Tomorrow will be a big day. To the Michael unit at 7:30AM, then back home for the Theophany Vigil, and then on the day of Theophany (Thursday), two baptisms, the Liturgy and blessing of the waters, a meal, then the baptism of the two children. I scheduled them separately because sometimes baptism of older children can be difficult because they get scared. I did not want to be in a time crunch.

I have received permission to bring in all the stuff I need to serve Divine Liturgy. I though this would take longer, and I do not yet have a singer for the liturgy, but I am working on it. I plan to serve liturgy once a month in each unit, with a sermon and everything, and to have teaching the other time. I want you to know and love the services as much as I do. All our theology is plain for all to see in our services.

I want you to know a lot of stuff about Theophany. It was actually more highly feasted in the early church than Christmas, for good reason. As is usual, I will draw on the archives of homilies and teaching I have written, because I just do not have the time and inspiration to write stuff all the time.

May God bless you and help you in all things.

Theophany, The Baptism of the Lord, & "Illumining". "To Fulfil all Righteousness".
 About Holy Water 1
 THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD, by St. Ioann (John) (Sergiev) of Kronstadt..... 5
 A Sermon about Holy Water, By Archbishop John Maximovich of Shanghai and San Francisco 7
 Questions and Answers about Theophany. 7
 Royal Hours of Theophany. Troparion of the pre-festival – Tone 4. Whereby we cross the flowing stream of life. 10

Theophany, The Baptism of the Lord, & "Illumining". "To Fulfil all Righteousness". About Holy Water

1999

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we celebrate a day that is called by many names: the Baptism of our Lord, Theophany, and it is also called

"Illumining". We commemorate our Lord's baptism today in the Jordan. Theophany is the appearance of God, where indeed the Holy Trinity manifested Himself after Our Lord's baptism. Why would we call it Illumining? It is because through baptism we are indeed illuminated.

God had a plan for man. The primeval plan was for us to grow in knowledge and in wisdom, according to how we could bear it, in purity, without any knowledge of evil at all. But man didn't choose that plan. So God, in His wisdom knowing this, sent his only-begotten Son.

Salvation is the knowledge of God, but only the pure can know the pure. We can even see this in our daily lives. There are people whom we just don't completely understand, and we know this because we understand that they're somehow more pure and more humble than us. And we think: "I don't understand how that person can take such abuse from her husband, or his son, or his co-worker, or some other person, and be so humble about it." We know people like that. Hopefully there are people that speak about us in those kind of tones, because we are supposed to be a light to the rest of the world.

Only the pure can know the pure. But we're dirty, and we *need* purification. And what's more, we don't have any way to become pure. We don't have any way to clean ourselves. And our flesh, what is more, wars against us. Even if we wished to clean ourselves, (and we don't have the means, without God's help, mind you), we cannot. We don't have the strength, the ability, we don't have the knowledge, we don't have the grace. We cannot understand God without Him revealing himself to us. So, that is why our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ came incarnate of a Virgin, into the midst of us - to invigorate us and make us able to live, but not only that; also to give us an example.

His ministry was two-fold. Being God, He taught us all the things that were necessary for our salvation, by His example, by how He lived, by how He spoke, by His demeanor. And He transmitted this faithfully and carefully to his disciples. And this is only to be found - this *mind of Christ* is only to be found - in the Orthodox faith, and it has been transmitted carefully and perfectly, throughout the ages, by the Church.

He showed us not only by His teaching, but also by how He lived. And He was a man, as well as being God, so He was subject to the things we are subject to, even unto death. So therefore, when He told us to be baptized, later on, after His resurrection, his words certainly have weight, because He subjected himself to baptism. He was not the kind of leader, or the kind of king, who would tell his subjects to do something that He wasn't willing to do. In fact, he said to James and John, that you cannot drink the cup that I will drink and be baptized with the baptism I will be baptized with. They could not bear what our Lord bore for us.

He will do more for us than He requires of us and expect more of Himself. And indeed, that is a principle of leadership. A leader, whether he be a father, a mother, or a priest, or an employer, or someone who teaches children, such as many of the men in this church, must lead by example. All the men in this church should be teachers of our boys, and all of the women, of our girls, and you teach them by being selfless, and emptying yourself as Christ emptied Himself. He taught us how to do it, and gave us the blueprint of how to do it.

Today we have an amazing thing before us. He who created the waters submits to being baptized in them. He who created the heavens and the earth and saw that it was good and not any whit evil, submits to cleansing in waters. He Who is the Regenerator regenerates our flesh, He descends in the flesh into regenerating waters. And he does this to show us how necessary it is for baptism.

To know Christ we must be like Him. You cannot know somebody unless you become like that person - it is not possible. So our Christian life in the flesh is to try to acquire the virtues, to be a good husbandman, to acquire the Holy Spirit, as my patron, St. Seraphim of Sarov, said, "By fasting, by diligence, by care, by prayers, by weeping, by repentance, by the whole Christian life." That is the whole reason for ascetical exercises. It's not because they're rules to be followed. It's because they are LIFE!

A man who sees a way of life that leads to eternal life, would be crazy, blind, not to follow such a life. So our Lord taught us many principles of how to live, but the most important aspect of His ministry is that He made us *ABLE* to live this way. I can tell you many things about the teaching of the Church, but I cannot invigorate you or make you able to live this way. That is only possible through your submission to the God-man Jesus Christ and the All-Holy Holy Trinity, Who makes a man able to live. So the God-man, when He preached, preached with authority, because He was able to back up his words like nobody else can.

Baptism is an image; it's an *image of death and of life*. The church says it over and over and over again. When we descend into the waters, we die. Our old man, with its lusts, dies in the waters. When we ascend out of the waters, we are reborn a new creature. This is a hard thing to understand. We cannot fathom it. We do not know how a man is reborn of water and the Spirit, we just know how we are told to begin the Christian life.

Baptism is the first mystery, although perhaps one would say the first mystery is really the incarnation of the Son of God, which made everything else possible. In our life, our entrance into the Christian life is through baptism. Without it, we're not able to progress one wit in the knowledge of God. **And the knowledge of God IS salvation, brothers and sisters.** But remember, **one cannot progress in the knowledge of God without progressing in purity at the same time.**

We have no "armchair theologians" in the Orthodox Church. He who is a theologian - who studies God - lives as God wishes him to live, and is enlightened. We have had theologians that have not been able to read or write. Or even, and this is hard for us in our industrialized society to understand, they might not even have been intelligent, as we would think of intelligence. But they were intelligent in the ways of God, because they lived a life in accordance with His grace.

I hope you understand now why our Lord was baptized. There was no NEED for Him to be baptized. In fact, what does it say after He was baptized? "Straightway He came up out of the water." To the fathers this is crystal clear, and therefore to us it will be now, too. He came straightway out of the water because He has no sin. In those days St. John was baptizing for repentance, a baptism of repentance, but not for remission of sins, because he cannot remit sins. People would, when they came out of the water - (and how would you like this, some of you have been baptized in streams that are cold!) - they were held in the water. They came up partway, and they confessed their sins right then and there. And then they were released out of the water. That's how it was done. But our Lord had no need to do so, He had no sins to confess. In fact, when He went into the water, the demons fled. You see the icon? You see the demons in there? The demons are fleeing from the water, because they could not bear to be in the same place as the God-man Jesus Christ.

How can anyone stand against this mystery when our Lord endorses it so emphatically?! And also, if we have an understanding of how water was treated, throughout the whole history of the Church - now I mean the history of the Church from Adam, you know, because God had a salvific plan from that time. There is a cute bumper sticker, but it's not true: "Founded AD 33, Christian Church." It was reborn, and recreated in AD 33, but the plan had been in place since Adam and Eve.

Let's take a look, a little bit, at these short scriptures we read today.

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John to be baptized of him. But John forbade Him, saying "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest thou to me?" And Jesus said unto him, "suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness."

It's a little bit of a riddle; what is He talking about, "all righteousness?" The Lord had no need for baptism or anything else to act upon Him in order to be righteous? He was able to save His human flesh by His own ability, but our human flesh requires baptism. He was baptized in order to change the nature of water so that, in those who believe, and by the grace of God, in the church, it can make a person capable of being saved, that is, to be perfected and know God intimately. We can therefore give a rather free paraphrase of our Lord's words as "Suffer it to be so now, because without baptism, you cannot become righteous"

It was also tradition, a strong tradition, a God inspired tradition, of the Jewish people, that when a prophet said something, you did it! Jesus obeyed a prophet. John was the greatest of the prophets; our Lord Himself said so. So He obeyed a prophet, by being baptized. John did not mean for the God-man to be baptized, and he wanted to tell him, "No, I can't. I am unworthy. I want to be baptized of you." He therefore was obedient showed us an example, and later, after His resurrection a command to be baptized.

Our Lord does not tell us to do anything we are not capable of doing. He does not tell us to do anything in the flesh that we cannot do in the flesh, and that he did not already do in the flesh. He told us that our flesh should become pure. His flesh was always pure; he made his flesh completely invigorated with the Godhead. And indeed, that will happen to us, because He did it to Himself. He promises us that we will rise from the dead. Well, he did it to Himself, so we are capable. He commands us to be baptized; He did it himself. He turned the other cheek when he was slapped by the arrogant Pharisees and by their henchman, the Roman soldiers. And He commands us to turn our cheek when we are slapped. He commands us to forgive, and He forgave.

There is nothing, there is no commandment that the Lord gave that He did not fulfill Himself in the flesh. And He even told us to be perfect, and He was perfect - in the flesh and as God. So all those things we are capable to doing because He did them for us and made us able to. He led by example, and He led by power and grace and mercy.

"Then He suffered him. And Jesus, when He was baptized went up straightway out of the waters and lo! The heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him. And a voice from heaven saying "This is

my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased."

We already said what it means that He went "straightway out of the water." John was in the water trembling, as a man before God. And God comes out of the water, and the Holy Spirit descends upon His shoulder, Jesus' shoulder, so as not to confuse the two. And the voice says, "This is my son, in whom I am well-pleased."

And the heavens are opened. Why? This is because the heavens are opened to us through baptism. And also the heavens are opened to us through something else. Right away after the baptism, St. Mark barely catches his breath, I don't think he even has to dip his pen again in ink, and he starts to write, "and straightway He was led out by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days."

There is a reason why he writes with such haste, why he doesn't even finish talking about baptism and wham! He is talking about Jesus being tempted in the wilderness, because this happens to us. Right after our baptism we are tempted. During the whole of our life we're tempted, and sometimes we feel that we are in a barren place, a rocky dessert, with no water and no comfort, and we get despondent. Our Lord had the same things happen to Him; He became hungry as a man, tired as a man, He wept as a man. And right after His baptism He shows that we should expect that we are in a life or death struggle.

Immediately upon being baptized we are enlisted as soldiers. Not as conscripts, mind you, but as willing men, willing to put on the armor of faith and of righteousness. We are willing to fight the good fight, because we have stated so, whether it was as an infant when our sponsors stated for us and we grew to maturity and we learned of the church, or whether it is, in the case of most of us, where we spoke for ourselves and agreed to the tenets of the Christian faith before we were thrust down into the water and out of it three times.

About Holy Water.

The Church today, (and yesterday by the way), blesses water. This is called the great blessing, and in it we read amazing passages from the Old Testament about water and its salvific qualities. And then we take this water and we sanctify everything with it. And you should listen closely to the services - especially I can remember some things from last night - they talk about how our Lord cleanses the water, casting out demons from it, and making it pure and wholesome. It is good - to drink, to anoint ourselves with, good to bless and sanctify everything. And we indeed bless and sanctify water because our Lord blessed and sanctified water.

I am always amazed - even after 18 years, how our faith involves all of our life - everything! All of our senses - sight, smell, hearing, touch, taste - everything! And every aspect of our life - nothing is untouched by the holy church. In a pious Christian life, nothing is secular, but everything is sacred.

So after we bless the water today, and bless the inside of the church, and go around and bless the outside precincts, you will take water home. You should drink this water in the morning, with the sign of the cross, and also eat a small piece of antidoron, before you eat or drink anything else. And you should also drink this water if there is a temptation or a difficulty in your life. You should anoint yourself with the water. You should sanctify things in your home.

I have had the custom of going around all the rooms of my house with a censer, with all the rest of the family carrying candles and singing the Theophany Troparion, to bless everything with holy water on a regular basis. I do not do it as much anymore - I guess I am more distracted and busy than I should be - but this is an important task. Anyone can do this. The demons see the water, even after the water dries on the walls and you cannot see it, (except if you have sprinkled it on paper, the marks never go away then), the demons still see it, and you have marked your house as a dwelling of Christians. But of course, if you do this, then you must live as a Christian. What happened to the man who had the demons taken out of him, and the demon went around deserts and rocky places, and desolate areas, and the found no place to dwell? What did the demon do? He got seven other demons worse than himself, and he went back to the man. They found his soul was all swept and garnished inside, but since the man had not lived a virtuous life since his deliverance from the one demon, and the demons were able to make their abode in him, and the last state of the man is worse than the first!

There is responsibility placed upon you, brothers and sisters, because of the grace you have been given - because of your baptism. Also because of the All-Holy mysteries which all of you should desire to receive today, and the services of the church, and all the mind of the church. Everything that you do is sacred, and it makes you responsible, for living according to how you have promised to live. The good news is that you are ABLE to do it, because the God-man made you able to do it!

God revealed Himself, and continues to reveal Himself to us, as we are able to understand Him. As we become more pure, He reveals more of His purity to us. And we ascend like eagles! That is the meaning of Theophany. That is the meaning of the illumining. May it be that all of are illumined and follow Him in all ways. Amen.

This homily is at: http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/sermons/feasts-of-the-savior-theophany-03_1999.html
http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/sermons/feasts-of-the-savior-theophany-03_1999.doc

There are many sermons on Theophany, and the days preceding and following Theophany at:
[http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/index.html#FEASTS OF THE SAVIOR- THEOPHANY](http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/index.html#FEASTS_OF_THE_SAVIOR-THEOPHANY)

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD, by St. Ioann (John) (Sergiev) of Kronstadt

From The Sun of Righteousness: On the Life and Teaching of Our Lord, Jesus Christ

John did restrain Him, saying: "I must needs be baptized of Thee, and dost Thou, then, come to me?" But Jesus said unto him in reply: "Let it be, for now, for thus doth it behoove us to fulfill all righteousness." (Mt. 3, 14-15)

Today the entire Orthodox Church universal celebrates the festive remembrance and glorification of the Baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. The holy Evangelist reports that when the Lord came to the Jordan to be baptized, John attempted to restrain Him, saying: "I must needs be baptized of Thee, and dost Thou, then, come to me?"

Would not we say the like, knowing Who this is Who has come: Lord, what doth it signify, this extreme humility of Thine, that Thou, the Lord Who is without sin, comest to be baptized of a man, even if he be one who is righteous through Thine own grace and righteousness?

What is there to wash away in Thee, Who art more pure than the sun; or to enlighten in Thee, the Sun of Righteousness? -- But is it for us sinful and short-sighted ones, deprived of far-sightedness, to gainsay the Lord Himself, Who created all things and Who wisely does much that is beyond word and reason?

All the words spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ, and all His actions, bear within themselves the seal of the supreme wisdom and righteousness of God, so incomprehensible to the proud scholars of this age, who dare to equate the Very Lord of Glory Himself to ordinary men, and who interpret His words in accordance with the understanding of their perverted and lost minds; -- and we must humbly bow ourselves down before Him with perfect trust and with profound reflection, beseeching the gift of understanding from God.

Hence, the aforesaid words of the Lord to John that he baptize Him silently, and without gainsaying Him, -- and the very act of baptism at John's hand -- likewise bear upon themselves the seal of the most-supreme wisdom, goodness, and righteousness of God.

Let it be, for now, says the Lord, for thus doth it behoove us to fulfill all righteousness; i.e., it is for this reason that I came to earth and became man, while abiding ever as God, -- the Lord says, as it were -- in order to fulfill all Divine righteousness, which was so brazenly trampled down in paradise by the first-created humans and, later, -- the further one penetrates into the depths of time and of the generations of man -- even more audaciously, more wickedly, more evilly, more profanely, was trampled down by all mankind, with the exception of a few chosen ones.

I come to take upon Myself all the iniquities and impurities of humanity, without being defiled by them, in order to make payment for them, thereby satisfying the justice of My Father in heaven, and to offer Myself as a redemptive Sacrifice, in order to immerse them all in the waters of the Jordan.

I, of Myself, as the sinless God-man, desire to wash away all human iniquities and to give to My Church a cleansing bath of eternal life in baptism by water and the Spirit;

I Myself, having fulfilled all righteousness, desire to teach people Divine righteousness, giving them the power and the grace to fulfill it.

That is the significance of the Lord's words to John: "Let it be, for now, for thus doth it behoove us to fulfill all righteousness."

Generally speaking, in the course of reading or hearing the Lord's words, or His gospel concerning His acts, we must not let it slip from our purview that He is the Lamb of God, Who taketh upon Himself the sins of all the world, and the Redeemer of the human race; the High Priest after the Order of Melchisedec, Who offered Himself as a Sacrifice of reconciliation to His Father in Heaven, on behalf of us sinners, -- that He is the Righteous Judge of all, the Physician of all those languishing in sin, and the Warrior Who has gone out to engage in spiritual single-combat that spiritual Goliath -- the devil -- who, with supreme artifice, cunning and perseverance, did subjugate, and continues to subjugate, the entire human race by means of innumerable passions and vileness of all sorts, and whom the Lord, through divinely-wise, righteous forethought, has vanquished completely, delivering mankind from his [the devil's] power.

Thus was the Lord also baptized in the River Jordan, in order to subdue our destroyer, the devil, in the waters wherein he had his haunt, and to leave the waters such, that we, in being baptized therein through triple immersion in the Name of the Holy Trinity, might be abundantly washed clean of the filth of the ancestral sin, and that we might be born again into a new life, through water and the Holy Spirit, and might become adopted [sons and daughters] of the Father in Heaven, by living a holy life.

The circumstances of the very Nativity of the God-man likewise bear the seal of the most-profound wisdom and righteousness of God. He was born of a poor Virgin, Most-pure, and was placed in a manger, wrapt in swaddling-cloths, like an infant, in order that through His humility He might make restitution for the pride of Adam and Eve, who aspired to be gods, in order to convict and mortify human pride, and to teach men humility, which is the foundation of all virtue.

All that the Lord spake and did on earth, He did in accordance with the pre-eternal, most-wise, and all-good Counsel of the Trinity, which transpired before all ages, all of which was necessary for the salvation, perfection and blessedness of mankind; and, if any rejected, and continues to reject, His commandments, counsels, statutes, and that Church which He founded on earth, the same was, and is, the enemy of God and of himself, having thus rejected the Divine Counsel concerning himself.

Baptism was ordained by God in the Church for the salvation of the human race, -- and it is necessary for every believer as a door into the Kingdom of God, -- and whosoever rejected or rejects it, the same sweeps away his salvation, his own eternal well-being. In this manner did the Lord speak of the Pharisees and the Scribes, who were undesirous of being baptized by John; that they were thus spurning the Counsel of God, concerning themselves, in not being baptized by him.

Beloved brothers and sisters! We all have been found worthy of holy Baptism in our infancy, through the faith of our parents and our sponsors; we were cleansed of the ancestral sin and were reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, and -- became the adopted children of the Father in Heaven.

The doors of the Kingdom of Heaven stand open to us.

Let us, then, with all our hearts, always esteem the Divine gift and our calling as sons and daughters of God by grace, -- withdrawing far from all sin, and let us, in our thoughts, desires, and actions, strive for the Kingdom of Heaven, that incorruptible, unfading inheritance, prepared for us in the heavens.

Amen.

Translated into English by G. Spruksts, from the Russian text of _"Krescheniye Gospodnye"_ ["The Baptism Of the Lord"] appearing in Part I, Chapter 6 of _"Solntse Pravdy: O zhizni i uchenii Gospoda Nashego Iisusa Khrista"_ ["The Sun of Righteousness: On the Life and Teaching of Our Lord, Jesus Christ"] by Protopriest [St.] Ioann [John] (Sergiev) of Kronstadt, pp. 23-27. English translation copyright © 1983, 1998 by The Saint Stefan of Perm' Guild, The Russian Cultural Heritage Society, and the Translator. All rights reserved

Source: <http://www.orthodox.net/theophany/theophany-by-st-john-of-kronstadt.html>

A Sermon about Holy Water, By Archbishop John Maximovich of Shanghai and San Francisco

On Theophany, that is, the Day of the Lord's Baptism, every year a great miracle is performed. The Holy Spirit, coming down upon the water, changes its natural properties. It becomes incorrupt, that is it does not spoil, remains transparent and fresh for many years, receives the grace to heal illnesses, to drive away demons and every evil power, to preserve people and their dwellings from every danger, to sanctify various objects whether for church or home use. Therefore Orthodox Christians with reverence drink Holy Water - a great Agiasma (holy thing), as the Greeks call it.

One should always have at home enough Theophany water so that it will last the whole year, and make use of it at every need; in cases of illness, leaving on a journey, whenever one is upset, students when going to examinations. They do well who daily, before eating any kind of food, drink a little Holy Water. It strengthens the powers of our soul - if it is done, of course, with prayer and reverence, and one does not merely expect from it a mechanical result.

Every priest should take care to bless a sufficient quantity of water for his church, so that it will be on hand for the course of the whole year for every need and to be given out to those who ask for it; and parishioners should provide for themselves at Theophany with Holy Water for the whole year and even so that it can be kept for future years.

Source: <http://www.orthodox.net/theophany/sermon-about-holy-water-by-archbishop-john-maximovich-of-shanghai-and-san-francisco.html>

Questions and Answers about Theophany.

QUESTION 1

When is Theophany celebrated? What does it commemorate? What is another name for this feast?

ANSWER 1

The feast of Theophany is Jan 6 (Jan 19 on the civil calendar).

It commemorates the baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ, and much more, as its name implies. The word "Theophany" means a "manifestation of God". This is similar to another word by which this feast is known, "Epiphany", which just means "manifestation".

We celebrate the baptism of Jesus Christ as a Theophany because the Holy Trinity was made manifest after His baptism (when He came out of the water).

And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: {17} And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my

QUESTION 2

Retell the story of the baptism of Christ. Which Evangelists report it?

ANSWER 2

All four Evangelists report the baptism of Christ, and its precursor, the preaching and baptizing of the Holy Prophet and Forerunner and Baptist John. The actual event of the baptism of our Lord is reported very laconically in St John's gospel, and is only alluded to.

Ministry of St John the Baptist: Matthew 3:1-12, Mark 1:1-8, Luke 3:1-20, John 1:19-34

Baptism of Christ: Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:29-34

The story is actually very simple. The Holy Prophet and Forerunner and Baptist John was preaching repentance and baptizing in the Jordan. His ministry was preparing the hearts of the people for Christ. Jesus came upon him one day and asked to be baptized. The Holy Prophet was filled with fear and in humility told that Lord that it was he that needed to be baptized, and not Jesus. Jesus told John to "suffer it to be so now, to fulfill all righteousness." The Lord was then baptized (immersed) in the waters of the Jordan, and upon coming out of the water, He saw the "heavens opened", and a voice was heard from heaven, which said, "Thou art my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased", and a dove descended upon Him.

QUESTION 3

Why was Christ baptized?

ANSWER 3

Our Lord answers this question: "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." (Matthew 3:15) Jesus has no need for the baptism of John, which was a baptism of repentance. (Matthew 3:11, and elsewhere). Neither did he have need for Christian baptism, which is the renewal of man and the making of a new creature. The God-man is totally sinless, and in no need of renewal.

The Holy Fathers tell us that "Righteousness" means the law. Christians are not forgiven the requirements of the law, since Jesus Christ came to fulfil the law, and not to destroy it. (Matt 5:17). The beginning we can have if we are to be perfect, as we are called to be (Matt 5:48, not an option!), is to have our nature renewed. Baptism delivers human nature from the curse, and we are made able to reach God, to know Him, and to become like Him in moral purity. (See Bl. Theophylact, commentary on Matt 3:15)

Our Lord was baptized as an example for us, to point out the necessity of baptism for man. There is no requirement that He has made for us that He did not fulfill Himself, including baptism. He did everything as a man that He requires of us, as men. He who endured smiting and spitting, and torment for our salvation demands of us that we turn the other cheek when we are smitten by our enemy. He Who prayed with fervor in the depth of the night demands of us that we pray without ceasing. He Who brought all things before His Father, and even the horrible specter of His impending death demands us to ask concerning all our needs. He Who submitted in all things to His Father demands of us that we pray, "Thy will be done" concerning all things in our life. He Who submitted Himself to baptism demands of us that we be born again, of water and the spirit.

"With the servants the Lord, with the criminals the Judge, cometh to be baptized. But be not thou troubled; for in these humiliations His exaltation doth most shine forth. For He who vouchsafed to be borne so long in a Virgin's womb, and to come forth thence with our nature, and to be smitten with rods, and crucified, and to suffer all the rest which He suffered; -- why marvellest thou if He vouchsafed also to be baptized, and to come with the rest to His servant. For the amazement lay in that one thing, that being God, He would be made Man; but the rest afar this all follows in course of reason." (St John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, Homily 22, Matthew 3:11)

"For righteousness is the fulfilling of the commandments "Since then we have performed all the rest of the commandments," saith He, "and this alone remains, it also must be added: because I am come to do away the curse that is appointed for the transgression of the law. I must therefore first fulfill it all, and having delivered you from its condemnation, in this way bring it to an end. It becometh me therefore to fulfill the whole law, by the same rule that it becometh me to do away the curse that is written against you in the law: this being the very purpose of my assuming flesh, and coming hither." (Ibid.)

QUESTION 4

What happened immediately after the Lord's baptism? What can we infer from this?

ANSWER 4

"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he

saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: {17} And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Mat 3:16-17)

The heavens were opened to show us that our baptism will open the heavens for us. God is made accessible to us. We can know the Unknowable. We can be changed. A good work is begun in us, and we have the means to have the promise fulfilled in us: "... He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6) We can only appropriate this promise, if we look up, unto heavenly things, and leave off earthly and corruptible things. "Wherefore were the heavens opened? To inform thee that at thy baptism also this is done, God calling thee to thy country on high, and persuading thee to have nothing to do with earth." (St John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, op. cit.) The Holy Spirit descended to show that He Who is baptized is greater than he who baptized. He is Who will baptize with the Holy Spirit, and with fire. (Matthew 3:11) When the voice came from heaven, the presence of the dove over Christ made it clear that the words were applied to the God-man, and not to His servant, John. "... The Spirit came in form of a dove, drawing the voice towards Jesus, and making it evident to all, that this was not spoken of John that baptized, but of Jesus Who was baptized." (St John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, op. cit.) (See also Bl Theophylact, Commentary of Matthew)

QUESTION 5

Where did the Lord go after His baptism? What happened? What may we infer from this? Another significant event happened while the Lord was away. What was it?

ANSWER 5

After the Lord was baptized, "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." (Mat 4:1). He was gone forty days and nights, during which time, He fasted. After this, the devil came to Him to tempt Him, offering Him three great temptations, which He easily overcame. It was also during this time that the Holy Prophet and Forerunner and Baptist John was put in prison, fulfilling the prophecy of John himself: "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30)

What are we to learn from the Lord's temptations, which followed immediately after His baptism? After our baptism, we must expect temptations. Our baptism begins our battle, and we must never rest. We must never think of the Christian life in an intellectual way, and must not be surprised when we encounter bitter temptations. No man can ascend unto dispassion and the knowledge of God without temptations. Can we really expect to be left with no difficulties in this life, when the Lord Himself was troubled and buffeted? Our Lord warned us: "For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke 23:31)

Let us endure our temptations, and ascend, unto our destiny and purpose. " My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; {3} Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. {4} But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." (James 1:2-4)

"For since with a view to our instruction He both did and underwent all things; He endures also to be led up thither, and to wrestle against the devil: in order that each of those who are baptized, if after his baptism he have to endure greater temptations may not be troubled as if the result were unexpected, but may continue to endure all nobly, as though it were happening in the natural course of things. " (St John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, Homily 23, Matthew 4:1)

QUESTION 6

Why did St John the Baptist baptize?

ANSWER 6

The Holy Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John's whole ministry was to point towards Christ. He himself tells us why he baptized: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Mat 3:11)

QUESTION 7

What major event in Israel points to baptism? Are there others?

ANSWER 7

The passage of the children of Israel through the Red Sea is a type of baptism.

Baptism is also alluded to in the magnificent event of the taking up of the Holy Prophet Elias in the chariot:

"The river Jordan was once turned back by the mantle of Elisseus when Elias had been taken up, and the waters were divided hither and thither. And for him the watery path became dry, verily as a type of baptism, whereby we cross the flowing stream of life. Christ hath appeared in the Jordan to sanctify the waters." (Troparion of the Forefeast of Theophany. Tone 4)

"And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. {10} And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. {11} And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. {12} And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. {13} He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; {14} And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over." (2 Kings 2:9-14)

QUESTION 8

Name at least five Theophanies in the Old Testament and one besides the baptism of the Lord in the NT

ANSWER 8

1. The Angel in the Furnace.
2. The Three Angels who met Abraham.
3. Moses seeing the "back parts" of God.
4. Moses and the burning bush.
5. Jacob wrestling the angel.
6. Elias in the cave and the "still small voice".
7. The Transfiguration of Christ

QUESTION 9

The pastor visits the homes of all his parishioners and the days shortly following. Why? How should one make ready for this visit?

ANSWER 9

It is a long-standing tradition in Holy Orthodoxy that the homes of all the faithful be blessed yearly, after the blessed feast of Theophany. The power of water to sanctify and transform is amply demonstrated in baptism, and we believe that God chooses to bless us through holy objects and actions, such as the relics of those who have pleased God, holy icons, oil and water.

The priest usually prays a short service of supplication and then blessed all living areas of the house with water, while singing the troparion for Theophany. In this way, the home of a Christian is "marked" and sanctified.

When the priest arrives, the home should be very clean, and picked up. The doors to all rooms except the bathrooms should be open. It is good to have a small table set up, with a cloth on it, and a candle. If the family has an icon of the Theophany, it can be placed there, along with any other icons that are well loved in the family. The best place to put this table is before the family's icon corner.

QUESTION 10

What is the fasting typicon for every day from Nativity up to and including Theophany?

ANSWER 10

The Nativity of the Savior is such a joyous feast that all foods are allowed on the day of the feast and all days following, until the day before Theophany, which is a strict fast (if this day is Saturday or Sunday, wine and oil are allowed). On Theophany itself, of course, all foods are allowed.

Source: http://www.ortodox.net/questions/theophany_1.html

Royal Hours of Theophany. Troparion of the pre-festival – Tone 4. Whereby we cross the flowing stream of life.

The River Jordan was once turned back by the mantle of Elisha /
when Elijah had been taken up, /
and the waters were divided hither and thither. /
And for him the watery path became dry, /

Verily as a type of baptism, /

Whereby we cross the flowing stream of life. //

Christ hath appeared in the Jordan to sanctify the waters.

This troparion is sung at each of the Royal Hours of Theophany. It describes an event which is a “type” or foreshadowing of baptism. Many Theophany hymns describe the many types of baptism in the Old Testament. A “type” is an event or thing which foreshadows or “points to” a future event or thing. A good rule of thumb regarding typology is that the more types there are for a given thing, the more important it is. There are many types for baptism, the cross and the resurrection, for example.

The dividing of the River Jordan when it was struck by the mantle of Elisha is an obvious type of baptism, since it evokes the memory of the dividing of the Red sea, which is perhaps the quintessential and most important type of baptism in the Old Testament.

This event has a nuance to it that the dividing of the Red Sea does not have. We know that when Christ was baptized in the same Jordan waters that were divided by Elisha’s mantle, “the Jordan turned back and fled” from the God man Jesus Christ.

If you listen carefully to our hymns you will see that they mix typology, history, dogma and moral instruction quite freely. The most important part of the hymn is at the end, when we sing:

Whereby we cross the flowing stream of life. //

Christ hath appeared in the Jordan to sanctify the waters.

Here is the moral connection that I talk so often about. Our Lord’s baptism “sanctified the waters”, that is, changed the nature of water so that the waters of baptism can enable our nature to live victoriously, and to become perfected. Whatever happens to us -- with baptism, we will be able to “cross the flowing stream of life” and find perfect rest. Baptism is not just an event. It is active throughout all of our “flowing stream of life”.

As in the parting of the Red Sea, the parting of the Jordan indicates for us that baptism is active in the beginning of our new life, in the middle (as we cross the flowing stream of life) and at the end, when we reach the other side. The waters are a wall of protection and also of guidance.

When we hear this hymn (and there are many opportunities for the zealous to hear), we should feel the moral implications of baptism. The God-man Jesus Christ made our humanity capable of perfection, so that we could know perfection – God, and in baptism He provided the means of this change.

And Eliu said to him, Stay here, I pray thee, for the Lord has sent me to Jordan. And Elisaie said, As the Lord lives and thy soul lives, I will not leave thee: and they both went on. (7) And fifty men of the sons of the prophets *went also*, and they stood opposite afar off: and both stood on *the bank* of Jordan. (8) And Eliu took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the water: and the water was divided on this side and on that side, and they both went over on dry ground. (9) And it came to pass while they were crossing over, that Eliu said to Elisaie, Ask what I shall do for thee before I am taken up from thee. And Elisaie said, Let there be, I pray thee, a double *portion* of thy spirit upon me. (10) And Eliu said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: if thou shalt see me when I am taken up from thee, then shall it be so to thee; and if not, it shall not be so. (11) And it came to pass as they were going, they went on talking; and, behold, a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and it separated between them both; and Eliu was

taken up in a whirlwind as it were into heaven. (12) And Elisaie saw, and cried, Father, father, the chariot of Israel, and the horseman thereof! And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his garments, and rent them into two pieces. (13) And Elisaie took up the mantle of Eliu, which fell from off him upon Elisaie; and Elisaie returned, and stood upon the brink of Jordan; (14) and he took the mantle of Eliu, which fell from off him, and smote the water, and said, Where is the Lord God of Eliu? and he smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither; and Elisaie went over. **(2Ki 2:6-14 Brenton, or 4 Kings, Sept, read during the Vespers Divine Liturgy on the Eve of Theophany)**

Source: <http://www.orthodox.net/journal/royal-hours-of-theophany-troparion-of-the-pre-festival-tone-4-whereby-we-cross-the-flowing-stream-of-life.html>

This document is at:

- <http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-pastoral-letter-2012-01-17+theophany+to-fulfil-all-righteousness.html>
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