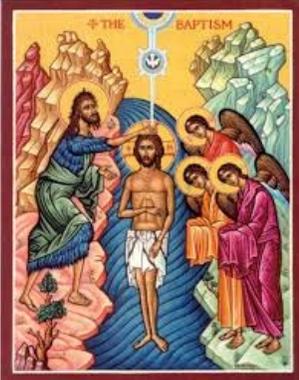


WHY DO ORTHODOX BLESS WATER & HOMES ON THEOPHANY?

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_water_in_Eastern_Christianity

Orthodox Use of Holy Water: Orthodox Christians most often bless themselves with holy water by drinking it. It is traditional to keep a quantity of it at home, and many Orthodox Christians will drink a small amount daily with their morning prayers. It may also be used for informal blessings when no clergy are present. For example, parents might bless their children with holy water before they leave the house for school or play. It is not unusual for pious Orthodox Christians to put a little holy water in their food as they cook their meals. It is also often taken with prayer in times of distress or temptation.



There are two rites for blessing holy water: the **Great Blessing of Waters** which is held on the Feast of Theophany, and the **Lesser Blessing of Waters** which is conducted according to need during the rest of the year. Both forms are based upon the Rite of Baptism. Certain feast days call for the blessing of Holy Water as part of their liturgical observance.

The use of holy water is based on the Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the River Jordan, and the Orthodox interpretation of this event. In their view, John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, and the people came to have their sins washed away by the water. Since Jesus had no sin, but was God incarnate, his baptism had the effect not of washing away Jesus' sins, but of blessing the water, making it holy—and with it all of creation, so that it may be used fully for its original created purpose to be an instrument of life.

Jesus' baptism is commemorated in the Eastern Orthodox churches at the Feast of Theophany (literally "manifestation of God") on January 6 (January 19th on the Julian Calendar/ "Old Calendar"). After the VIGIL of this feast, a font of holy water is typically blessed in the church, to provide holy water for the parish's use in the coming year. The next morning, after the Divine Liturgy, a procession goes from the church to a nearby river, lake or other body of water, [when practical] to bless that water as well. This represents the redemption of all creation as part of humanity's salvation.



In the following weeks, the priest typically visits the homes of the members of the parish and leads prayers of blessing for their families, homes (and even pets), sprinkling them with holy water. Again, this practice is meant to visibly represent God's sanctifying work in all parts of the people's lives.

GREAT BLESSING OF WATERS ON THEOPHANY



On the Great Feast of Theophany, holy water is blessed twice: at the conclusion of the Vigil on the eve of the feast, and on morning of the feast itself. After processing to the place where the vessel of water is prepared during singing of appropriate troparia (hymns) of the Theophany there are a group of Scripture readings (Isaiah 35:1-10, Isaiah 55:1-13, Isaiah 12:3-6, and 1 Corinthians 10:1-4), culminating in the baptism account from the Gospel of Saint Mark (1:9-11) followed by the Great Litany. This is sung just as at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, but with the following additional petitions which make clear what is being asked

of God and what the use, purpose, and blessing of the water is believed to entail.

That these waters may be sanctified by the power, and effectual operation, and descent of the Holy Spirit, let us pray to the Lord.

That there may descend upon these waters the cleansing operation of the super-substantial Trinity, let us pray to the Lord.



That he will endue them with the grace of redemption, the blessing of Jordan, the might, and operation, and descent of the Holy Spirit, let us pray to the Lord.

That Satan may speedily be crushed under our feet, and that every evil counsel directed against us may be brought to naught, let us pray to the Lord.

That the Lord our God will free us from every attack and temptation of the enemy, and make us worthy of the good things which he hath promised, let us pray to the Lord.

That he will illumine us with the light of understanding and of piety, and with the descent of the Holy Spirit, let us pray to the Lord.

That the Lord our God will send down the blessing of Jordan, and sanctify these waters, let us pray to the Lord.

That this water may be unto the bestowing of sanctification; unto the remission of sins; unto the healing of soul and body; and unto every expedient service, let us pray to the Lord.

That this water may be a fountain welling forth unto life eternal, let us pray to the Lord.

That it may manifest itself effectual unto the averting of every machination of our foes, whether visible or invisible, let us pray to the Lord.

For those who shall draw of it and take of it unto the sanctification of their homes, let us pray to the Lord.

That it may be for the purification of the souls and bodies of all those who, with faith, shall draw and partake of it, let us pray to the Lord.

That he will graciously enable us to perfect sanctification by participation in these waters, through the invisible manifestation of the Holy Spirit, let us pray to the Lord.



Then, following a lengthy set of didactic prayers that expound on the nature of the feast and summarize salvation history, praising God's creation of and mastery over the elements, the priest makes the Sign of the Cross over the water with his hand and prays specifically for the blessing to be invoked upon it. At the climax of the service, he immerses the hand cross into the water three times in imitation of Christ's baptism to the singing of the festal Troparion (*Tone 1*):



*When Thou, O Lord was baptized in the Jordan, /
The worship of the Trinity was made manifest, /
For the voice of the Father bore witness to Thee /
And called Thee His beloved Son. /
And the Spirit, in the form of a dove, /
Confirmed the truthfulness of His word. /
O Christ, our God, Who has revealed Thyself /
And has enlightened the world, glory to Thee!*

The priest then blesses the entire church and congregation with the newly consecrated water. All come forward to be sprinkled over the head with the Theophany Water as the kiss the hand cross, and to drink some of it.

The priest will then set out to bless the homes of all of the faithful with Theophany Water. In large parishes, this process will take some time. However, the priest must bless all of the houses of the faithful before the beginning of Great Lent. In monasteries the Abbot will bless the cells of all of the monks.

Orthodox Christianity teaches that the Great Blessing of Waters actually changes the nature of the water, and that water so blessed is no longer corruptible, but remains fresh for many years. [Wikipedia article slightly edited, with photos added]