

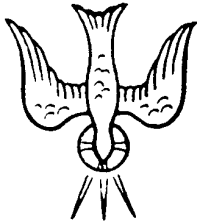


# The Apostle

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## The Significance of the Baptism of Our Lord by Bishop Alexander Mileant



On the day of our Lord's Baptism we recall the miracle of His divine epiphany, or manifestation — the Theophany. Indeed, at the Baptism of our Saviour, the One Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, for the first time revealed Himself to man in Three Persons: God the Father — through His voice; God the Son — by His baptism in the Jordan; and the Holy Spirit — by His descent in the form of a dove. For this reason the troparion of the feast of the Baptism says that on this day *"the worship of the Trinity was made manifest."*

The feast day of the Theophany or the Baptism of Christ occupies a special place among the twelve great feast days of the Church. It reminds us how we were spiritually reborn when the priest thrice immersed us in the water of baptism. It also reminds us of the vows which we made before the holy font; if, as infants, we were not conscious of them, our spiritual sponsors, or godparents, made them on our behalf, and were later to explain to us the meaning of the sacrament of Baptism and the content of Christ's teaching.

During the sacrament of Baptism, the priest recalls Christ's Baptism and prays to God in these words: *"All creation magnifieth Thee, Who hast manifested Thyself. For Thou, O our God, hast revealed Thyself upon earth, and hast dwelt among men. Thou didst hallow the streams of Jordan, sending down upon them from heaven Thy Holy Spirit, and didst crush the dragons who lurked there. Wherefore, O King Who lovest mankind, come now and sanctify this water by the coming of Thy Holy Spirit... And grant unto it the grace of redemption, the blessing of Jordan. Make it the fountain of incorruption, the gift of sanctification, the remission of sins, the remedy of infirmities; the final destruction of demons, unassailable by hostile powers, filled with angelic might.... Wherefore, O Lord, manifest Thyself in this water, and grant that he who is baptized therein may be transformed; that he may put away from him the old man, which is corrupt through the lusts of the flesh, and that he may be clothed with the new man, and renewed after the image of Him who created him: that being buried, after the pattern of Thy death, in baptism, he may, in like manner, be a partaker of Thy Resurrection; and having preserved the gift of the Holy Spirit, and increased the measure of grace committed unto him, he may receive the prize of his high calling, and be numbered with the first-born whose names are written in heaven, in Thee, our God and Lord Jesus Christ."*

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, an early father of the Church, states that for a Christian the water of Baptism is *"both a grave and a mother."* It is a grave for our former sinful life without Christ, and the mother of our new life in Christ and in His realm of everlasting righteousness. Baptism is the door from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of light. *"As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."* He who is baptized into Christ is also enrobed in Christ's righteousness, becomes like unto Him and is made a partaker of His holiness. The power of baptism lies in the fact that a baptized person receives the ability and strength to love both God and neighbour. This Christian love leads a Christian to lead a righteous life and assists in overcoming attachment to this world with all its sinful pleasures.

The sad thing about a large number of our contemporary Christians is that they apply very little effort to enkindle more brightly in their hearts this grace-filled gift of love which they have received. An unhealthy attachment to the world has crowded spiritual love out of their hearts and replaced it with bitterness, malice and envy.

Consequently, in celebrating the great feast day of the Theophany, let us remind ourselves of the promise we made at baptism to love God and our neighbour. Let us thank God for making us worthy of spiritual birth and for inviting us into His realm of eternal blessedness. Let us try to be deserving of this great honour and God's great mercy.

## The Blessing of Homes at Theophany



It is a good custom in the Church to have one's home blessed at Theophany or shortly afterwards. Although this can happen at any time during the year, the feast of the Theophany is especially appropriate.

The Great Blessing of the Waters is for a sanctification of the whole created order, of and for which all Christian people are priests unto God. To have one's home blessed at Theophany therefore is not only a great blessing for the family but also through that family the blessing is extended in a vast web of relationships across the whole world. God pours out his Spirit upon all who call upon Him. This is our domestic and cosmic Pentecost. As Christ sanctified the waters by his immersion in the Jordan so now the waters blessed in the Name of the Trinity irrigate the whole world. Don't hesitate to ask Fr. Gregory to come out and bless your home in January. Please use one of the slips at the back of church.

### St. Macarios on the Human Heart

*"The heart itself is but a small vessel, yet dragons are there, and there are also lions; there are poisonous beasts and all the treasures of evil. But there too is God, the angels, the life and the kingdom, the light and the apostles, the heavenly cities and the treasures of grace—all things are there."* (H.43.7) St. Macarios the Great

## A Barber's Story



A man went to a barbershop to have his hair cut and his beard trimmed. As the barber began to work, they began to have a good conversation. They talked about so many things and various subjects. When they eventually touched on the subject of God, the barber said: "I don't believe that God exists."

"Why do you say that?" asked the customer. "Well, you just have to go out in the street to realize that God doesn't exist. Tell me, if God exists, would there be so many sick people? Would there be abandoned children? If God existed, there would be neither suffering nor pain. I can't imagine a loving God who would allow all of these things."

The customer thought for a moment, but didn't respond because he didn't want to start an argument. The barber finished his job and the customer left the shop. Just after he left the barbershop, he saw a man in the street with long, stringy, dirty hair and an untrimmed beard. He looked dirty and unkempt. The customer turned back and entered the barber shop again and he said to the barber:

"You know what? Barbers do not exist." "How can you say that?" asked the surprised barber. "I am here, and I am a barber. And I just worked on you!" "No!" the customer exclaimed. "Barbers don't exist because if they

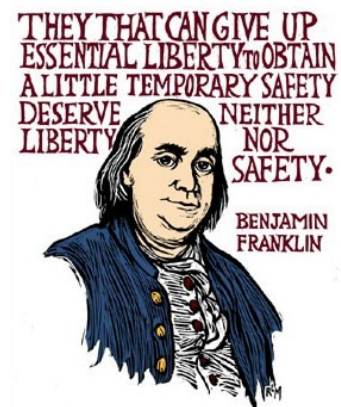
did, there would be no people with dirty long hair and untrimmed beards, like that man outside."

"Ah, but barbers DO exist! That's what happens when people do not come to me."

"Exactly!" affirmed the customer. "That's the point! God, too, DOES exist!"

That's what happens when people do not go to Him and don't look to Him for help. That's why there's so much pain and suffering in the world."

## From Elizabeth Wilson



### Benjamin Franklin

*"In reality there is perhaps no one of our natural Passions so hard to subdue as Pride. Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive, and will every now and then peep out and show itself. You will see it perhaps often in this History. For even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my Humility."*

(Benjamin Franklin in his Autobiography)

A remarkable man in so many ways. As a young man he drew up a set of Rules by which he tried to live his life. These make interesting reading and have certainly given me "food for thought."