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**32<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY OF PENTECOST -Tone 7. New Martyrs of Russia.** 3Ven. Xenophon, wife Mary, Arcadius and John, of Constantinople(5<sup>th</sup> c.). Ven. Theodore, Abbot, Martyrs Ananias Presbyter, Peter, and 7 soldiers, in Phoenicia. St. Simeon of Mt. Sinai (390). St. Joseph, Bishop,St. Theodore of Studion.Rt. Blv. David, King of Iberia (1125). Ven. Xenophon of Robika (1262).  
1 Timothy 1:15-17 Matt. 15:21-28

### Announcements

**Liturgical Schedule: SUNDAYS:** Divine Liturgy 9:30am **Saturdays:** Great Vespers 4:00pm

**On Sunday, Feb. 23 Father will speak on the understanding the Divine Liturgy after coffee hour.**

**Blessing of Homes, please call Father to schedule a time for your house to be blessed.**

**Choir Rehearsal Saturday 3:30pm prior to Great Vespers.**

**Church School following Divine Liturgy on Sundays.**

**Votive Candles: There is a sponsor for the month of February.**

### The Great Blessing of Water

The Great Blessing of Water takes place in the Orthodox Church on the Feast of the Epiphany, sometimes called the Theophany. The word "*epiphany*" means the shining forth or manifestation or appearance or revelation. The word "*theophany*" means the shining forth or manifestation or appearance or revelation of **God**.

In His baptism by John in the Jordan River, Jesus manifested Himself for the first time as the Messiah of Israel. At the baptism John refers to Christ by the messianic title of the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." (John 1:29) At this time as well the voice of the Father calls Jesus the "Beloved" which is also a messianic title from the OT. (Isaiah 42:1) And it is written that the Spirit of God descended and rested upon Jesus, which also shows Him to be the long-awaited Messiah, the Redeemer of the world. (Isaiah 61:1-2, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22, John 1:33)

Sometimes people think that the blessing of water and the practice of drinking it and sprinkling it on everyone and everything is a 'paganism' which has falsely and sadly crept into the Christian Church. We know, however, that this ritual was practiced by the People of God in the OT (John 5 and 7), and that it continues to exist in the NT Church of Christ with a new and very important meaning and significance. The service of the Great Blessing of Water itself reveals the meaning of the event for the Christian People.

### Sanctification of the World

It is the faith of Christians that since the Son of God has taken human flesh and has appeared in the world, immersed in the Jordan River, all flesh and all matter is sanctified and made pure and holy in Him, purged of its death-dealing qualities inherited from the devil and the evil and wickedness of men.

In the Lord's epiphany to the world, all creation becomes good again, indeed "very good," the way that God called it and created it to be in the beginning of time. (Genesis 1:31)

At this time, as well, the "Breath of Life" was breathing in man and in everything that was made to be alive by God for a life of living communion with Him. (Genesis 1:30, 2:7).

The world and everything in it is indeed "very good." And when it becomes polluted and corrupted and dead, filled with evil and not with God, then God Himself does everything to save it and glorify it once more. This is what Epiphany, and the Great Blessing of Water specifically tells us: that God has saved and glorified by Christ and the Spirit the "very good" creation that He made through the same Christ and the same Spirit in the very beginning of the world.

### God is With Us

The consecration of the waters places the entire creation - through its "prime element" of Water in the perspective of the cosmic sanctification and glorification of the Kingdom of God brought to the world by Christ and the Spirit. The Great Blessing of Water tells us that man and the world were created and saved to be "filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:19), the "fullness of Him who fills all in all." (Eph 1:22). It tells us that the "new heavens and the new earth" which God has promised through His prophets and Apostles are truly "*with us*" - for *God is with us* - already now in the mystery of Christ and the Church. (Is 66:22, 2Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1).

Thus the sanctification and drinking and sprinkling of water at Epiphany is no pagan ritual. It arises from the depths of the biblical and churchly faith and experience of the People of God as the expression of its most central doctrine. It proclaims and celebrates the deepest conviction and vision of the Christian Faith that man and his world have the vocation and destiny "*to be filled with all the fullness of God*."

### The Blessing of Homes

The central sign of God's sanctification of all things through Christ's epiphany to the world and His baptism in the Jordan River, is the act of blessing homes. According to the Orthodox Faith, the family is considered to be a "small church", and the family table is the "home altar" where the people gather daily to receive their "daily bread" from God with thanksgiving in the Name of Christ. The priest, who is the father of the greater "family of God," the Church community, comes to each of the "small churches" bringing the blessings of God the Father and all of the brothers and sisters in Christ. The priest asks God to have mercy on the house, to rid it of every evil and fill it with every blessing. All pray together for the good of the living and the departed of the family, and of all who live in the house.

All sing the great hymn of salvation that Christ, the Son of the Father by the grace of the Holy Spirit, "has revealed Himself and has enlightened the world." Thus the house itself, along with the living persons of the family, is {filled with all the fullness of God." *The Great Blessing of Water Pamphlet Dept. of Religious Education, DCA*