



**Orthodox Church of the
Entrance of the Theotokos
into the Temple**

**306 W. Main Street
Emmitsburg, MD 21727**

**The V. Rev. Elias Yelovich,
Rector**

<http://EntranceMission.org>

The Sanctification of Matter
January 22, 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is baptized! In the Jordan!

The courses of the Jordan received thee, O Fountain; and the Comforter descended in the likeness of a dove. Yea, He who bowed the heavens, boweth His own head; and the clay crieth unto the potter, saying, "How dost Thou command me to do what is more exalted than my station? It is I who need to be baptized by Thee! Wherefore, O Christ God, who art sinless, glory to Thee!" (From the Stichera at Great Vespers for Theophany).

The question is often asked: Why would He Who is without sin submit to a Baptism of Repentance? Scripture simply says that our Lord told John, "To fulfill all righteousness." What that means is not entirely clear, is it? There was no Law requiring Baptism at the hand of John, so it does not appear to be about obedience to the Law. Perhaps it was more about the "righteousness of humility." A transition from the old ways to the new, from the old Testament to the new Testament. In the old, we brought ourselves before God in repentance, to make a fresh start. But in the New, the Spirit would be poured out not only on the Son of God, but upon all flesh. The Spirit would dwell in our hearts, whether we acknowledged Him or not. Waiting and slowly drawing us ever closer. Jesus even said, did He not, that John was the greatest of the prophets of the Old Covenant, but anyone in the Kingdom of God was greater

than He!

We celebrate this ancient feast with the Great Blessing of Waters every year. The Holy Spirit is called down upon the waters, this year by two priests, who breathed on the water, signed it with the Cross, and called down the Spirit to sanctify the water, ordinary water that came from the Emmitsburg water system. We drink it for several weeks after Liturgy, taking into ourselves that sign and symbol of the presence of God. We carry it home in bottles and then, after two weeks or so, the priests bottle it up and place it in Holy Water bottles on a shelf behind the iconostasis.

It does no one any good there, if it remains in the bottle. The waters of the Jordan were sanctified the physical submission of the Savior to Baptism. Those waters flowed through Israel, into Lake Galilee and the Dead Sea and eventually into the Mediterranean where they joined with all the oceans of the world. The waters evaporated and fell as rain on every continent, island and location throughout the world. The essence of God spread freely, everywhere present, filling all things. This is what happened by our Lord's submission to Baptism in the River Jordan at the hands of the clay, so eloquently expressed in the Sticheron above.

The Great Blessing of waters and water sanctified are truly sacramental. We do not limit the Grace of God's own self-giving to the western medieval notion of seven sacraments. There are many ways in addition to the seven classic Sacraments that God bestows His Grace, Holy Water among them. We treat the Holy Water with respect, we keep it separate, but we do not keep it only in a jar tucked away in some cabinet at home. We take it, sprinkle it freely throughout the house regularly. We do so when we are sick and when we are well, for even then, when we are physically well, we are in need of the sanctification of God's presence symbolized by the Holy Water. And remember: Symbols are very powerful things! They are not magic; that would be to undermine them! Symbols convey in truth that which they represent – in the case of Holy Water, the sanctification of purity, and the presence of God in every nook and cranny of life.

Yea, He who bowed the heavens, boweth His own head; and the clay crieth unto the potter, saying, "How dost Thou command me to do what is more exalted than my station? It is I who need to be baptized by Thee! Wherefore, O Christ God, who art sinless, glory to Thee!"

Fr. Elias

Orthodox Church of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

306 West Main Street

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

<https://EntranceMission.org>

717-817-0084