

THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

—Commemorated January 6th—

When the Lord Jesus Christ became thirty years old, He proceeded to the Jordan River to be baptized by Saint John the Forerunner. He did this predominantly in order to reveal to humanity that He is God incarnate. For, as He was being baptized, the voice of God the Father came from the heavens stating: **“This is my beloved son, in Whom I am well pleased” (Mt. 3:17)**. In this manner, God testified that Christ is indeed His true and genuine Son, consubstantial with the Father. Simultaneously, the heavens were parted and the Holy Spirit of God descended as a dove upon Jesus, thus unequivocally indicating that God was referring to Jesus Christ as His Son, not Saint John the Forerunner. **“And John bore witness, saying, ‘I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He [the Holy Spirit] remained upon Him [Christ]. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God” (Jn. 1:32-34)**. Thus it became apparent to the Jews who were present and who held Saint John the Baptist in high esteem that the Forerunner was not greater than Christ, but that he was a mere servant incomparably inferior to Christ.

This day is also referred to as Theophany, because during Christ’s baptism it was revealed that God is a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As the dismissal hymn of the feast day states:

“When Thou, wast baptized in the Jordan, O Lord, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest. For the voice of the Father bore witness to Thee, calling Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the certainty of the word.”

And as another hymn from the canon of the feast day declares:

“The Trinity was revealed in the Jordan River. For the Father, the all-divine Essence Himself, announced: ‘This One Who is baptized is my beloved Son!’ And the Spirit came upon Him Who was like unto Him.”

Saint John the Forerunner had been instructed by God to go to the Jordan River and baptize people, as Saint Luke the Evangelist mentions: **“the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Lk. 3:2)**. The Lord Jesus Christ, being sinless, had no need to be baptized. However, just as He had kept the entire law throughout His entire life, He wished to fulfill this commandment of God as well. Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ proceeded to be baptized just as everyone else. Saint John the Forerunner, perceiving Christ’s sinlessness and sensing his own unworthiness, was filled with deep reverence for the Lord and asked: **“I have the need to be baptized by You, and You are coming to me?” (Mt. 3:14)**. To this the Lord replied, **“Permit it to be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt. 3:15)**. The Lord used the word **“righteousness”** to indicate the fulfillment of all the commandments. It is as if He was saying, “I have kept and fulfilled all the commandments of God’s law. This is the only one that remains; thus, I have to fulfill this one as well.” Subsequently, Saint John proceeded to baptize the Lord.

“And the Lord immediately came out of the water” (Mt. 3:16; Mk. 1:10)
Why do the Evangelists Matthew and Mark stress that Jesus came out of the water immediately? All the people coming to be baptized without exception were sinful. After entering the water, each person would confess their sins to the Forerunner and then be baptized. Thus, a certain amount of time would pass before they would come out of the water again. Jesus Christ, however, being sinless, had no sins to confess, and this is why after entering the water and being baptized, He came out immediately.

Saint John the Forerunner would baptize people by immersing them into the water once. This baptism was greater than the Jewish baptism, because Saint John did not advise the people, “wash your clothes and bathe your body, and you will be clean,” as the Jews would do. Rather, he commanded them, “bear fruits worthy of repentance.” It was nonetheless inferior to Christian baptism, because it neither bestowed the Holy Spirit, nor granted remission of

sins, as occurs for everyone who is baptized with a triple-immersion in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, as our Lord Jesus Christ taught us.

When Christ was baptized, the current of the Jordan River stopped and began to flow in the opposite direction, according to the prophecy: **“The sea saw and fled, the Jordan turned back ... What happened, O sea, that you fled, and to you, O Jordan, that you turned back?... The earth shook from the Lord’s face, from the face of Jacob’s God” (Ps. 113:3-7)**. This miracle continues to take place in the Jordan River every year on January 6th during the “Blessing of the Waters” service, which is led by the Patriarch of Jerusalem. During this ceremony, the current initially flows in the usual direction. However, at the point in the service when the cross is thrown into the gently flowing Jordan River, the waters start to bubble in areas. This bubbling intensifies and spreads, and in following the direction of the current is reversed! After the cross is retrieved from the water, the flow of the Jordan River reverts to its normal direction. This event has been witnessed by thousands of pilgrims annually.