

# Holy water

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**Holy water** is water that has been blessed by a bishop or priest for use in the rites of the Orthodox Church including baptism, blessing persons, places, and objects or as a means of repelling evil.

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### Services of the Orthodox Church

Divine Liturgy

Daily Cycle

Vespers | Compline | Midnight Office | Matins

First, Third, Sixth, and Ninth Hour Services

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Akathist Hymn | Paraklesis

Great Blessing of Water | Artoklasia

Baptism-Chrismation Service

Ordination Service | Marriage Service

Funeral Service | Memorial Service

## Usage

A quantity of holy water is typically kept in a font placed near the entrance of the church where it is available for anyone who needs it. Holy water is sometimes sprinkled on items or people when they are blessed, as part of the prayers of blessing. For instance, in Alaska, the fishing boats are sprinkled with holy water at the start of the fishing season as the priest prays for the crews' safety and success. 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.

The use of holy water is based on the story of Jesus' baptism by Saint John the Baptist in the River Jordan and the Orthodox interpretation of this event. In this 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 himself, his baptism had the effect of Jesus blessing the water, making it holy, that is used fully for its original created purpose to be an instrument of life.

## Theophany

The **Great Blessing of Water** is held on the eve of the feast of the Theophany (January 5) and/or the feast of Theophany itself (January 6), following the Divine Liturgy. The blessing remembers the event of the Lord's baptism, the revelation of the Holy Trinity, and also expresses Orthodoxy's belief that creation is sanctified through Christ.

Jesus' baptism is commemorated in the Orthodox Church at the Feast of Theophany (literally "God shining forth"). At the Vespers 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 in some parishes, the prayers often include a trip to a nearby river, lake or other public source of drinking water, 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 parish's members and prays prayers of blessing for their families, homes and 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.

Holy water can also be blessed at any other time of the year if there is a need, and this is usually done on the first day of a month. The holy water used for a baptism is blessed as part of the baptism service.

## **Great Blessing of Water**

On the feast of Holy Theophany holy water is blessed twice, at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgies both on the eve and on the feast itself. After processing to the place where the vessel of water is prepared to the singing of appropriate troparia there are a group of Scripture readings culminating in the baptism account from the Gospel of Saint Mark (1:9-11) followed by the Great Litany. This is sung just as for the 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:

That there may descend upon these waters the cleansing operation of the super-substantial Trinity:

That he will endue them with the grace of redemption, the blessing of Jordan, the might, and operation, and descent of the Holy Spirit:

That Satan may speedily be crushed under our feet, and that every evil counsel directed against us may be brought to naught:

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:

That he will illumine us with the light of understanding and of piety, and with the descent of the Holy Spirit:

That the Lord our God will send down the blessing of Jordan and sanctify these waters:

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:

That this water may be a fountain welling forth unto life eternal:

That it may manifest itself effectual unto the averting of every machination of our foes, whether visible or invisible:

For those who shall draw of it and take of it unto the sanctification of their homes:

That it may be for the purification of the souls and bodies of all those who, with faith, shall draw and partake of it:

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

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 and then blesses the entire church and congregation with the newly consecrated water.

## **Blessing the water**

The blessing the water begins with the chanting of special hymns, with the censing of the water, and concludes with Bible readings, petitions and prayers.

The water is in a large container in the middle of the nave, or the service may be held at a freely flowing natural source. If celebrated indoors, the container of water may be decorated with candles and flowers as the symbol of the beauty of God's original creation through his Word and Spirit. During the service, a cross is dipped three times into the water.

After the blessing service, the faithful fill their containers to take some **holy water** home with them. This water is also used to bless homes during the Theophany season.

Water is seen by the Church as the prime element of creation. In blessing water, it is asked that the original purpose of water, as a source of life, blessing and holiness be revealed as one drinks it. In the Book of Genesis, creation began when the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters.

In the blessing of water it is seen that the world and everything in it is "very good" (Gen. 1:31) and when it becomes corrupted, God saves it once more by effecting the new creation in Christ, his divine Son and our Lord by the grace of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 6:15).

The celebration of the Great Blessing of Water is an affirmation that through Christ's own baptism, he has lifted the curse of Adam's sin, and given the creative goodness of God's creation back to mankind once again. Thus when Christians are baptized, they are baptized into Christ, part of the creation that is sanctified in Christ.

## **See also**

- Life-Giving Spring

## Source

- [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Holy_water&oldid=49421283) - Entry on holy water ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Holy\\_water&oldid=49421283](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Holy_water&oldid=49421283))

## External link

- Epiphany (<http://oca.org/OCchapter.asp?SID=2&ID=81>) - OCA web site, *The Orthodox Faith* by the V. Rev. Thomas Hopko

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