

Preparation for Blessing of Homes

The central sign of God's sanctification of all things through the feast of Theophany is the act of blessing the homes of faithful Christians. The priest visits all members of the Church to pray with them in the place where they live, and to bless their surroundings with Holy Water. He asks God to have mercy on the house, to rid it of every evil and to fill it with every blessing. Thus the house itself, together with the living persons of the family, is "filled with all the fullness of God."

This year the Blessing of Homes will take place from Tuesday January 6 to Saturday February 20.

To prepare for the priest visit:

- On your dining room table or family altar, place a white tablecloth, a lighted candle, an icon, and a wide bowl for holy water. [Note: Father will bring water with him]
- If you have any items to be blessed (Icon, Cross, etc.), put them on the table where the blessing takes place.
- Have a list of the living and dead members of the family from your family for whom you would like the priest to pray for.
- Turn on a light in each room, so the priest can see where he is going.
- Turn off all TV's, stereos, and computers, and take the telephone off the hook. There should be as few distractions as possible when the priest is blessing your home.
- Refrain from smoking, drinking or eating until after the service is over.
- Secure any pets that might jump up on the priest or family, or "get underfoot" as you move from room to room. (Pets may be blessed too!)
- When the Priest arrives, have everyone in the home gather around the table and join in the blessing. Participation is important!
- If you need to discuss a personal matter with Father, this is the time to do so. Time is made
- between appointments for this reason.

The children or adult may lead the priest around the house with a lit candle.



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ABOUT ORTHODOXY—BLESSING WATER & HOUSES

Q: Why do we bless houses (and almost anything else that we can sprinkle) with water during Theophany?

A: I look at it like this: This world, this creation, is in captivity; it is enemy held territory. The evil one, having enslaved all of creation at the fall, has laid claim to every nook and cranny of this earth. And for a while it looked as though he might be able to hold onto it. But then he reached too far and attempted to enslave the Master of All and to bind Life with the chains of death and his power was broken. But creation is still fallen, it is still contested land in the spiritual battle.

We, as Christians, are engaged in this struggle to reclaim fallen nature for the Kingdom of God. We often talk about this in terms of our own salvation, but the Church, addressing all of creation in a holistic manner, also reaches out and reclaims a bit here and a bit there of creation in general. We do this in order that we might restore the usefulness of creation for working out our own salvation. Hence we bless anything that might help us in our salvation - and by blessing it we reclaim it for the Kingdom of God.

There are few things more vital to our lives than our homes. In our homes we pray, we work, we talk to others, we order our lives, we work out our marriages, etc.

What more important place to reclaim for the Kingdom of God - or is it better to continue living in a place which is occupied by the enemy. For the most effective working out of our salvation, we must drive the enemy out of our homes, and keep him at bay by our prayers, our righteous life, and the annual sprinkling by Holy Water at Theophany.

**SAINT BASIL THE GREAT,
ARCHBISHOP OF CAESAREA**

Celebrated on January 1

Basil was born during the reign of Emperor Constantine. While still unbaptized, Basil spent fifteen years in Athens where he studied philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy and all other secular sciences of that time. His colleagues at that time were Gregory the Theologian and Julian, later the apostate emperor. In his mature years he was baptized in the river Jordan along with Euvlios his former teacher. He was Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia for almost ten years and completed his earthly life fifty years after his birth. He was a great defender of Orthodoxy, a great light of moral purity, a religious zealot, a great theological mind, a great builder and pillar of the Church of God. Basil fully deserved the title "Great." In liturgical services, he is referred to as the "bee of the Church of Christ which brings honey to the faithful and with its stinger pricks the heretics." Numerous works of this Father of the Church are preserved; they include theological, apologetical, ascetical and canonical writings as well as the Holy and Divine Liturgy named after him. This Divine Liturgy is celebrated ten times throughout the year: the First of January, his feast day; on the eve of the Nativity of our Lord; on the eve of the Epiphany of our Lord; all Sundays of the Honorable Fast [Lenten Season], except Palm Sunday; on Great and Holy Thursday and on Great and Holy Saturday. St. Basil died peacefully on January 1, 379 A.D., and was translated into the Kingdom of Christ.

Why Bless a Home?

By Fr. Sergei Sveshnikov

The Orthodox Church teaches that we do not have two separate lives—a secular one and a spiritual one—but one human life, and that all of it must be holy. We must not be Christians for just a few hours on Saturday and Sunday, spending the rest of our life godlessly, that is to say, without God. The person who has united with Christ in the sacrament of baptism cannot be a part-time Christian, but must be faithful to Christ everywhere and at all times—in church, at work, at home, in relationships with other Christians, and in those with non-Christians—we must be faithful to Christ in the fullness of our life.

The Holy Orthodox Church teaches us that a temple is not only a building in which we worship, but that we are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16); that the Body of Christ is not only that of which we partake at the Divine Liturgy, but that we are the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27). And just as the Gifts of the Eucharist are

treated with reverence and kept in sanctified vessels in the altar, so should every Christian's life be full of reverence and sanctity not only during a church service, but likewise outside the walls of the temple. A Christian's home must become a small temple, work—labor for the glory of God, and family—a small Church.

The Orthodox Church helps her children strive for holiness in their lives and brings sanctification to every Christian home—a small temple. The Church blesses the very foundation of a home in the same way that it blesses the foundation of a church, it blesses a new Christian home in the same way that it blesses a new church, and yearly, after the blessing of a parish church with the water of Theophany, the Church brings this holy water into the homes of the faithful. The prayers for the blessing of a church are different from those for the blessing of a home, because the function of a home is different from that of a church, but the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit is one. And just as in the baptism of our Lord all of creation is washed clean and sanctified, every year after the feast of the Baptism of the Lord Christians sanctify themselves and their homes with the water of Theophany.

The Church teaches us to sanctify everything: dwellings, places of work, all our pursuits, and the fruits of our labor. And just as a church and sacred vessels, once sanctified and set aside for sacred use, can no longer be used for anything profane, in the same way a Christian washed in the baptismal waters, and his home, and all his works can no longer be the dwelling of sin and the works of Satan, but only and always—the temple of the Holy Spirit and the fulfillment of the will of our Heavenly Father. This is why the Church blesses everything that can be found in a Christian home; and if something is not worthy of being blessed, then there should not be a place for it in the home of a Christian.

Beloved Christians, you and your children shall appear at that Judgment of Christ, and you shall give account for them to the just Judge. He will not ask you whether you have taught your children the arts or whether you have taught them to speak French, of German, or Italian, but whether you have taught them to live as Christians.

~ St. Tikhon of Zadonsk ~