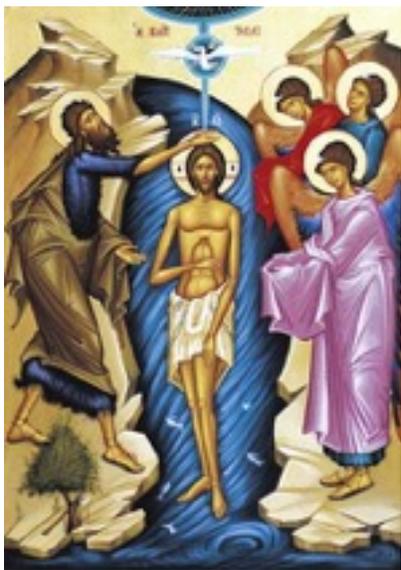


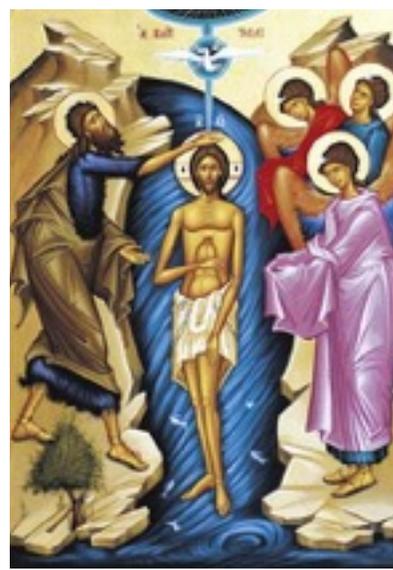
FATHER ANTON'S WORDS OF WISDOM: This Sunday and over the next couple of weeks, many parishes will hold the Great Blessing of Water celebrating the Baptism of Christ. Many parishes will move this Feast to Sunday (as we do at St. John's)



giving more people the opportunity to call to mind the importance of this event in the life of Christ and in turn in the life of the Christian. Through the Baptism of Christ in the River Jordan water takes on a whole new meaning; it becomes sanctified. Prior to the idea of Baptism promoted by the John the Baptist, no one thought much about water other than that it was necessary for everyday living. Christ lowers himself to be baptized by John, but then he is exalted by God as the Holy Spirit descends on him and a voice declares "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." For you and I water is a part of our everyday lives and we take it for granted. We go to the tap, and there it is; fresh, clean and plentiful.

We use it for cleaning, drinking, cooking, washing and cooling, and don't think much about it. We see its power to cleanse and heal, and we witness its awesome power to destroy. We take for granted that it will always be there. What would happen to you tomorrow if all of a sudden your supply of water stopped? How would you wash? What would you clean with? How would you cook and drink? There are those in the world that face this every day, and when they do get a few drops of precious fresh and clean water they cherish it and they do everything they can to preserve it. Perhaps we, too, need to look at water not as a commodity, but as a precious gift. Maybe we, too, should learn to appreciate it more and protect it. Maybe we could try to be less wasteful and appreciate its value for human life. There is another side of water that I think we need to think about, and that is what a powerful symbol it is for the Christian. The single most important thing that happened to you and me was our Baptism, when we "Put on Christ."

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Water has washed away the old, and has allowed for the new to be created. We have died with Christ that we may live with him. We have become members of God's family through a Christian Community. So what does all this mean? It means that we need to be more in tune with the spiritual aspect of our daily living. Since we have put on Christ, it's not possible just to take him off like a piece of clothing. No, we are now one with him, in body and spirit; he shares our lives just as he did the lives of those that lived in his time. His gift of life is eternal and it cannot be destroyed. Sadly many have forgotten their Baptisms, and they have fallen away from the families they were initiated into. Pews are empty in many of our parishes, and the souls that are present are getting up in years. We have created a world where priorities have changed. Life is measured now by "things" and not by "what kind of person I am." Our children grow up with everything we didn't have; thinking that that will enrich their lives. Yet, as they grow they are not satisfied and are searching for something more. They believe that happiness can be found in bigger and better "things," but they are still disappointed. Sometimes they come to the realization that it's time to get off the merry-go-round and search out something more stable and they find it in their spirit. They realize that there is something out there greater than themselves, the world, or the "things it has to offer." Today everyone is looking for a way to find peace in their lives and a sense that things are okay; that they are unfolding the way they are for a reason. Today at the Divine Liturgy at St. John's we all have the opportunity to renew the baptismal promises that were made on our behalf so many years ago. Hopefully somewhere along life's road you made the conscious decision to be a follower of Christ; you have accepted and invited him to share your life. If not, it's never too late. There's no time like the present. So as you witness the Great Blessing of Water on this wonderful Feast Day, and recall that even Christ submitted himself to baptism, think of your own calling to serve, and listen somewhere in the quiet as God declares about you the same as he did about Jesus over 2000 years ago... "You are my beloved son/daughter in whom I am well pleased. **Let us pray: Loving Jesus, over 2000 years ago you allowed yourself to be baptized by John in the Jordan River. You gave us an example of true humility and as a result were exalted by your Father. We pray Lord that we may be humble in heart and spirit that we might become one with you. As I sing "All who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ." may its meaning sink deep into my soul; so that every moment of everyday; I am aware of your loving presence. Amen**

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