

## WEEKLY MEDITATION

### On Theophany and Holy Water

In the following texts, St. John of Damascus reminds us that water is a vehicle of spiritual cleansing when it is **blessed and received in faith**. He lists a number of instances from scripture in which God uses water to wash away sinfulness and to purify and give life. Our own blessing of water - for example, at Theophany - and our use of holy water - for example, in blessing our homes - stands in continuity with this great biblical theme. It places us squarely within the ongoing story of God's saving activity, of the ways in which He acts for us and for our salvation. His gift - our receiving in faith.

*Water, then, is the most beautiful element and rich in usefulness, and purifies from all filth, and not only from the filth of the body but from that of the soul, if it should have received the grace of the Spirit (St. John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith: 23.58-60).*

*[Christ] laid on us the command to be born again of water and of the Spirit, through prayer and invocation, the Holy Spirit drawing nigh unto the water. For since man's nature is twofold, consisting of soul and body, He bestowed on us a twofold purification of water and of the Spirit, the Spirit renewing that part in us which is after His image and likeness, and the water by the grace of the Spirit cleansing the body from sin and delivering it from corruption, the water indeed expressing the image of death, but the Spirit affording the pledge of life. For from the beginning the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, and also the Scripture witnesses that water has the power of purification. In the time of Noah God washed away the sin of the world by water. By water every impure person is purified, according to the Law, even the very garments being washed with water. Elijah showed forth the grace of the Spirit mingled with the water when he burned the sacrifice by pouring on water. And almost everything is purified by water according to the law: for the things of sight are symbols of the things of thought. The regeneration, however, takes place in the Spirit: for faith has the power of making us sons, creatures as we are, by the Spirit, and of leading us into our original blessedness (Expos. 82.25-52).*

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