

## GOYA SESSION: THEOPHANY

### OBJECTIVE

To offer young people a greater insight into the feast of Theophany, while also gaining an understanding of what takes place when water is blessed.

### PREPARATION

Familiarize yourself with the Biblical narratives of the Baptism of Christ (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-34). Read through the prayers in the service of the Blessing of Waters which can be found in the Online Chapel of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Website ([www.goarch.org](http://www.goarch.org)). Become aware of the Theophany icon and what the different parts represent.

Try to use the term *Theophany* to describe this feast, even though you may be more familiar with *Epiphany*. You might want to explain to everyone that the term *Epiphany* describes a revelation or manifestation, while *Theophany* is a more specific term, describing the revelation or manifestation *of God*.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Bibles (*with Old and New Testaments and Concordance*)
- Icon of Theophany
- Handout of Bible Passages
- Handout of prayers
- Handout of GOYA Notes
- Journals and large envelopes to seal them in
- Pens/Pencils
- Flip Chart and Markers
- Paper
- Very large glass or plastic bowl filled with water (*1 per group*)
- Pepper shakers (*1 per group*)
- Bars of white soap (*1 per group*)

### OPENING PRAYER (*all together*)

*Grant, Lord, to keep us this day without sin.*

*Blessed are You, Lord, God of our fathers, and praised and glorified is Your name forever. Amen.*

*Lord, let Your mercy come upon us, for we have trusted in You.*

*Blessed are You Lord; teach me Your commandments.*

*Blessed are You, Master; make me to understand Your commandments.*

*Blessed are You, Holy One; enlighten me with Your commandments.*

*Lord, Your love endures forever; do not turn away from the work of Your hands.*

*To You belongs praise, song, and glory, to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.*

### ICEBREAKER: WATER, DIRT AND THEOPHANY

This activity is mainly for fun and designed to get them thinking about words discussed later in this session. Break up into groups of 5-8 people, and give each a piece of paper and

something to write with. Let them know that during each round they will be given a word, and in one minute they have to come up with as many things they can think of in relation to that word. The more creative they are, the more points they will earn for their team.

Start with the word water, then dirt, and finally Theophany. When the minute is up for each word, have one group share their answers. If another group has the same answer, everyone must cross it out. The answers that remain after all the groups report back are counted as points. At the end, the team with the most points wins.

**STATE** (*paraphrase in your own words*)

We just had some fun using words that we will be talking about today: water, dirt and Theophany. I want to start our discussion by looking at this icon.

*Bring out the icon of Theophany. If your group is large, consider ways to enlarge the image so everyone can easily see it.*

**DISCUSS** (*accept all answers and reflect back*)

- What is going on in this icon? (*Jesus is being baptized and the Holy Trinity is being revealed*)
- Who is in this icon? (*John the Baptist, Jesus, Holy Spirit*)
- Who is John the Baptist? (*The forerunner, cousin of Jesus, son of Elizabeth and Zachariah*)
- What did John the Baptist do and say? (*John baptized Jesus even though he objected and considered himself unworthy. He also told his followers that while he baptized with water, Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit.*)
- Why do you think Jesus needed to be baptized? (*Allow all answers, both right and wrong, for this question. Do not reveal which is correct.*)

**STATE** (*paraphrase in your own words*)

This last question is a difficult one to answer. Why did Jesus, who is God, need to be baptized? This is precisely what we will be talking about today. Let's begin with the Bible. We are going to read the accounts of Jesus' Baptism found in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.

**READ** *Mark 1:1-8 and Matthew 3:13-17*

**First Reader.** *Mark 1:1-8*

*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight." John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

**Second Reader:** *Matthew 3:13-17*

*Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him,*

*“Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

**STATE** (*paraphrase in your own words*)

You have seen the icon story of the Theophany and you have also heard the Biblical accounts. Now, let’s look closer at the other two words we examined in our opening icebreaker: *water and dirt*.

**ACTIVITY:** CLEANING THE WATER

Allow the youth to break into groups (or place them in groups depending on your preference). Give each group a bowl full of water and a pepper shaker, and ask them to gather around it.

**STATE** (*paraphrase in your own words*)

Imagine this is the water that existed when God created the earth and the heavens.

- In the book of Genesis, what is the adjective God uses over and over again to describe His creation? (“*Good.*” Throughout the creation account, God says that everything is “*good.*”)

**READ** *Genesis 1*

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light;” and there was light. And God saw the light that it was **good**; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day. Then God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.” Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day. Then God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear;” and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And God saw that it was **good**. Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth;” and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was **good**. So the evening and the morning were the third day. Then God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth;” and it was so. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was **good**. So the evening and the morning were the fourth day. Then God said, “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens.” So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was **good**. And God*

blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." So the evening and the morning were the fifth day. Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind," and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was **good**. Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food;" and it was so. Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was **very good**. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

- So, if everything was created good, what happened to creation? (After the fall, when sin entered the world, it was no longer "good.")

Instruct each group to dirty the water by sprinkling pepper onto it. The more pepper, the better!

- What happens to water as years go by? (It becomes more and more dirty)
- How can we clean this water?

Now instruct the groups to get all the pepper out of the bowls without losing any of the water. After some time has passed, ask:

- Can we get all the pepper out without losing any water with our fingers?
- Can we get all the pepper out without losing any water with a spoon?
- Can we remove the pepper without losing any water ourselves?

Hand out the bars of soap. Instruct the soap-holders to dip a bar into the center of each bowl (if you have never done this exercise, the soap entering the water will cause the pepper to disperse to the sides of the bowl instantly).

- What happened when the soap entered the water?
- Why couldn't we get the water clean by ourselves?
- Who does the soap represent? (Christ, as He enters the water, He sanctifies and restores it to its original state.)

**STATE** (paraphrase in your own words)

Water, like earth, fire, and wind is one of the four elements necessary for our existence. 55% to 65% of our body is made up of water. In Genesis, we read that water has always existed even before the creation of the world, as creation began "when the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters." Throughout the Bible, water plays an important and

‘mystical role’ in human existence and in man’s relationship with God the Creator. In our present time, water serves many functions and has come to represent many different things. In your groups, take the next five minutes to discuss the following:

- What does water represent to you?
- What are common uses for water?

After five minutes have passed, give each group a Bible with a concordance. Quickly review how to look for things using the concordance. Have them do the following:

- Find out how many references to water there are in the bible.
- Find one quote about water and discuss it.
- Share their findings with the group

**STATE** (*paraphrase in your own words*)

Water, a fundamental necessity of human life, is seen in many ways. To some, water is seen as a purifier that physically washes away dirt and uncleanness, while to others, it is seen as dangerous and full of mysteries. So, let’s revisit our earlier question:

- Why did Jesus need to be baptized?

*Accept a few answers and then supplement with the following:*

There are three reasons that Christ needed to be baptized. First, when Christ went in the water to be baptized, He cleansed it of sin (like the soap did with the pepper in the bowl), and because the water of baptism is now cleansed, we can now be washed in it. The second reason is that Christ’s immersion and subsequent rising from the water foretold His death and Resurrection. When Christ dies on the Cross, He takes on the sins of the world and descends into Hades, and in His Resurrection, we see that he conquers sin and death. In the same way, when Christ goes down into the water, He foreshadows His death and descent into Hades, and when He rises from the water, He foreshadows His Resurrection—He emerges having conquered sin and death. The third reason that Christ was baptized is so that we may follow His example.

- How is Christ’s Death and Resurrection (His Passion) revealed in this feast?

As we explained above, when Christ descends into the waters, He takes upon Himself the sins of the world, of humanity, and drowns them in the depths of the river. Christ then rises from the water having conquered sin and death, just as in His Resurrection from the dead, proclaiming the destiny of humanity, and the fulfillment of His Passion.

- How is the Trinity revealed in this feast?

The Trinity is revealed during the story of Theophany as the voice of the *Father* is heard, the *Spirit* is seen in the form of a Dove, and the *Son* is present in the water. Theophany is

also called the “feast of lights,” as early Christians celebrated this day by being baptized themselves, that is, the Trinity was revealed or “illuminated” to them as they put on Christ.

- How do the baptisms given by Christ differ from the baptisms given by John?

When John baptized, it was for the repentance of sins; while it prepared the people for the coming of Christ, it was a baptism only of water. Once Christ sanctifies the waters during His baptism, the purpose changes—the act of baptism is now about communion with our Lord. While baptisms after the coming of Christ are still about repentance, turning from our sins, and still involving water, baptism takes on an additional meaning. When we are baptized, we profess our faith in Christ, asking His Spirit to live within us, so that we may join our life to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (communion with God).

#### **WRAP UP** (*paraphrase in your own words*)

Have you ever noticed what happens to water after it has been sitting for a while? It, like us, is not perfect. Just as we are overcome with sin in the world, water too can be polluted. This is why we bless water, calling upon God to rid it of every visible and invisible stain, so that it may be restored to its proper function. We ask and pray that the original purpose of water, a means towards communion with God, a source of life, and its holiness and blessing, be revealed to us. When water is blessed on Theophany, we not only drink it to bless ourselves, but also use it to bless our homes, cars, etc, so that the Grace of God’s presence fills and sanctifies every aspect of our lives.

Ultimately, we look forward to the time when all of creation, not only water, is sanctified and living in communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

#### **JOURNAL REFLECTIONS**

Each of you has been given a journal to be used throughout the year. As we mentioned, this is a place where you can write from your heart, and **no one is going to read it unless you choose to share it**. For the next ten minutes, reflect on the lesson we just had. Consider the following (write on a flip chart for all to see):

- How is Christ’s stepping into the waters of the Jordan ultimately connected to His death and resurrection? Why is that important for us?
- During the Baptismal service we sing:  
*All who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia.*
- How do we put on Christ?

We ask that when you finish, you remain silent. Take this time to pray, think, or read a short passage from the Bible (make Bibles readily available for each young person).

After the ten minutes, take some time to allow young people to share their thoughts as they wish, then pass out one large envelope to each person and instruct him or her to put their journal inside. Ask them to seal the envelope and sign their names where the flap meets the envelope, so they feel confident that no one can access their journal. Collect the envelopes and store them in a safe place where they will be accessible at the next session.

### **CLOSING PRAYER** *(all together)*

*When You O Lord were baptized in the Jordan,  
The worship of the Trinity was made manifest;  
For the voice of the Father bore witness to You,  
Calling You His beloved Son;  
And the Spirit in the form of a dove  
Confirmed the truthfulness of His words;  
O Christ Our God, Who did appear and enlighten the world,  
Glory to You.  
-Apolytikion of Theophany*

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### **FURTHER RESOURCES**

- [These Are the Sacraments](#) by Anthony Coniaris - This book explains the seven sacraments of the Orthodox Church using simple language.
- [Epiphany: Festival of Lights](#) - This video was produced by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and can be viewed on their website at [www.goarch.org](http://www.goarch.org).
- [Cross and the Quill](#) - This is a newsletter published by teenagers of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese. There is a wonderful article about Theophany that can be accessed by visiting: [www.antiochian.org/1218](http://www.antiochian.org/1218).