

What us is born  
[Basil choir 1<sup>st</sup>]

PREFACE: Baptism of the Lord

That's a special prayer, at the beginning of the Eucharist, for today which is a celebration of the Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the Jordan river. Usually this festival is on a Sunday, the one following Epiphany, and it is effectively the last day of the Christmas season. Yesterday, though, we had a late celebration of Epiphany; so today this festival brings Christmas to an end. A bit late you may think, when everyone has probably long ago forgotten about it already. And anyway, what's the Baptism of Jesus to do with Christmas — surely that was 30 years later, according to the traditional reckoning, and certainly not in Bethlehem. So, maybe some clarifications are needed: this celebrating of the Baptism of Jesus as the end of the Christmas period has a long history. Though it did get obscured until the calendar reform that followed the 2nd Vatican Council. And even after that, at least here in Hong Kong, we missed out on it (and also I think impoverished our understanding and celebration of Christmas) by putting a special day of prayer for peace on the Sunday following Epiphany. The point is, as some of the early and not-so-early Christian writers explained, and the Christian tradition observed in its public worship, Jesus' Baptism was one of the three Epiphanies in the coming of Christ into our world, His birth - early years. We now think of Epiphany (which means the manifestation, making public, bright & clear) — we think of it almost exclusively as the arrival of the three wise men who followed their star to find the Christ child at Bethlehem. But Christmas in a sense <sup>is</sup> all Epiphany — the shepherds too had a message given them, and they went and saw and recognised. Jesus' birth was the manifestation of God among us. But besides the star and the wise men

in the actual festival day we call Epiphany, there's also a remembrance of the appearance and manifestation of God among us that took place in a small town called Cana in Galilee when Jesus made water into wine, his first "sign" as St John's gospel calls it. And the other Epiphany is when at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, the voice of God was heard, His Spirit seen descending.

☪☪ Responses, Brew. p 379  
[Baptism]

Christmas Vespers  
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For vespers today, this Christmas vesper hymn from the Orthodox church "Heaven & earth"

MUSIC - PRAYERS

(Brew. 6<sup>th</sup> Jan  
+ Bapt.)

Finally today, from a sermon for the feast of the Lord's Baptism, by St Gregory Nazianzen

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Brew. p 379