

EPIPHANY, LITURGY OF THE

The celebration of the Epiphany, one of the seven major feasts (see FEASTS, MAJOR) of the Coptic church, takes place on the eve of 12 Tubah. It commemorates the manifestation of the divinity of Jesus Christ as He was [baptized](#) in the river Jordan. There are four services on this feast.

1. In the evening prayer and the *psalmodia*, the priest conducting the service says the prayers of the [raising](#) of incense for the evening of the feast. These are followed by a [hymn](#) in glorification of Saint John the Baptist, beginning with: “A glorious name indeed is thine, O kinsman of Emmanuel.”

Meanwhile a special tank, or basin, called *laqqan*, is filled with water. At the conclusion of this [hymn](#) the clergy and deacons, carrying crosses and lighted candles, proceed to the middle part of the nave of the church, and say the prayers of the office of midnight. Then the *psalmodia* is said over the *laqqan* water.

2. In the *laqqan* service, the *laqqan* basin is a symbolic representation of the river Jordan, scene of Christ’s baptism. The Coptic Orthodox church in [Jerusalem](#) holds this particular service of the [Epiphany](#) festival at the riverside, while the rest of the prayers are conducted in the Monastery of Saint [John the Baptist](#) close to the river.

In some of the older churches in Egypt, the *laqqan* basin, which is made of marble, stone, or metal, is usually kept underneath the floor in the middle of the nave, covered with floor boards, marble, or flagstones. It is used only on three occasions throughout the year: for the service of the sanctification of the waters, for the footwashing on Maundy Thursday, (see FEASTS, MINOR) and for the footwashing on the feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul.

The priest begins with the words, “Have mercy upon us O God Father almighty. All-holy Trinity, have mercy upon us. Lord God of powers, be with us, for we have no help in our tribulations and afflictions save Thee.” The people say the Lord’s Prayer and the prayer of

thanksgiving. This is followed by lections containing relevant prophecies from the Old Testament, in this order:

[Habakkuk](#) 3:2-19; Isaiah 35:1,2; 40:1-5; 9:1,2; Baruch 3:36-38; 4:1-4; Ezekiel 36:24-29; 47:1-9.

The Pauline epistle is taken from 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. The [hymn of John the Baptist](#) follows, after which the people recite the Trisagion (see MUSIC), and the priest says the intercession of the Gospel, and reads the Gospel (Mt. 3:1-17). The priest then says "O God, have mercy upon us," etcetera, after which the deacons sing "*Kyrie eleison*" twelve times. Then follow the seven great intercessions, for the sick, the travelers, the winds and the fruits, the head of state, the dormants, the oblations, and the catechumens. The priest then recites the petition and lifts up the cross of lighted tapers, and the people say "*Kyrie eleison*" one hundred times. This is followed by the three great prayers (for peace, the fathers, and the congregation) and the celebrant says the prayer for the sanctification of the waters, at the end of which he signs the water three times with the cross, saying, "Sanctify this water, impart to it the grace of the River Jordan. . . . Thou didst sanctify the streams of the Jordan, having drawn upon them Thy [Holy Spirit](#) from heaven. . . . Do Thou now sanctify this water. May it become the fountain of blessing, a gift of purification, an absolver from sin, a purger of sickness, that it may be a purification of the soul, body and spirit, for all who shall draw from it or partake of it. . . ."

The people say the Lord's Prayer, and the priest recites the three prayers of Absolution, followed by the benediction.

At the end of this service, the assistant priest takes a white napkin, called *shamlah* (see LITURGICAL VESTMENTS), dips it into the water, and signs the forehead of the chief priest with it three times, an action symbolic of the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ by the hand of John the Baptist. After this, it is the chief priest who takes the *shamlah* and signs the priests, the deacons, and the congregation on the forehead. Meantime, the deacons sing Psalm 150 and the

priest says a prayer of thanksgiving.

3. In the service of morning offering of incense, prayers are resumed from the sanctuary, and deacons go back to their usual place at the choir.
4. The Divine Liturgy, as is usually the case in all major feasts of the church, is celebrated according to the Anaphora of Saint GREGORY, with the following variations appropriate to the Epiphany: (1) following the reading from the SYNAXARION, the deacons sing the [hymn](#) of Saint John the Baptist; (2) the psalm versicle is Psalm 117: 25, 27; (3) the Gospel is from John 1: 18-34; (4) after the sermon the deacons sing the Gospel hymn for the Epiphany: “This is the Lamb of God who carries the sins of the world, He who brought a [horn](#) of salvation to save His people. Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah; Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was [baptized](#) in the Jordan”; and (5) the theme of the FRACTION prayer is regeneration of man through baptism: “Thou hast granted us the grace of filiation through the laver of the new birth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.”

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