

# THE PARISH NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2018

The Nativity of the Mother of God Russian Orthodox Church  
617 Sand Creek Road, Albany NY (518) 869-3932

**A parish of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad [www.albanyrocor.org](http://www.albanyrocor.org)**

*Rector: Protopriest Alexis Duncan ; Protopriest Michael Fritz*

*Protodeacon: Fr. Michael Soloviev*

## CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

### JANUARY NAMESDAYS

3	Julianna Federow	18	Foster Kinnear
4	Anastasia (RaeLynn) Gonyea	20	Ioann Popov
	Anastasia Miller	25	Tatiana Taylor
	Anna Nikiforov		Tatyana Kosovskij
	Ana Welsh		Tania Scott
6	Eugenia (Jeannie) Stabinsky		Tania Buchanan
14	Stephen Taylor		Tanya Purcell
	Jacob Welsh	27	Nina Vespritskaya
	Joseph Stabinsky		Nina Federow
	Joseph Nazar		Nina (Shelby) Hoops
	Joseph (Brian) Farley		Nina Pasheda
13	Melanie Taylor		Nina Kalavazoff
17	Dennis Raskin	28	Paul Turaev
		30	Anthony Mazzucco

MNOGAYA LETA! MANY YEARS to all of our Parishioners celebrating their Namesday in the month of January.

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### IMPORTANT DATES JANUARY

January 6 <sup>th</sup> -	<b>ROYAL HOURS - 8:30 am</b>
	<b>NATIVITY VIGIL - 5pm</b>
January 7 <sup>th</sup>	<b>NATIVITY LITURGY 9:30 am</b> (No COFFEE HOUR)
January 14 <sup>th</sup>	<b>YOLKA</b>
January 18 <sup>th</sup>	<b>THEOPHANY VIGIL 6:30 pm</b>
January 19 <sup>th</sup>	<b>THEOPHANY LITURGY 8:30am</b>
January 21 <sup>st</sup>	<b>GRATITUDE LECTURE</b>
	<b>CHILDREN'S COFFEE HOUR &amp; CAKE AUCTION</b>
January 28 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Coffee Hostesses - A. Gonyea, P. Markessinis; T. Scott</b>

**\*\*\* CONFESIONS FOR NATIVITY WILL BE HEARD ON SATURDAY EVENING - NO CONFESIONS WILL BE HEARD ON SUNDAY BEFORE OR DURING HOURS/LITURGY.**



## PARISH YOLKA

The annual Parish Yolka will be held on Sunday, January 14<sup>th</sup> following the Divine Liturgy. Matushka Cecelia Soloviev is in charge of the Entertainment portion of the Yolka with the assistance of Junia Dragon. The children have worked hard to prepare for the play and their individual performances. Thank you to Olga Usova who is Santa's helper in purchasing the gifts for the children. Please come and support our Parish Youth and help as much as you can. We need people to set up the Hall on Saturday (tables, chairs and decorate). We also need people to clean the hall after the Yolka. We know this will be a long day - but with everyone's help the task will go quickly. .

Tania Scott is organizing the parents to handle the Dinner aspect of the Yolka. Thank you Tania! We are asking parishioners to please bring a dessert for the Yolka. We are also asking for volunteers to help with the set-up and clean-up of the Church hall. If you are able to help with the set-up or clean up, please contact Tania Scott 518-250-5863. This is a fun day for all and we hope that all children will participate and that their parents will help with the clean-up.

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## CHURCH FRESCOES

Father Theodore will be returning on February 20<sup>th</sup> to continue work on the beautiful frescoes in our Church. It is estimated that we will need approximately \$15,000 - \$20,000 for the next payment. At this time the Fresco fund is well below that targeted amount. We hope that everyone will be generous in their donations to the Fresco fund. All donations would be greatly appreciated for the beautification of our Church. What a perfect way to remember someone's birthday or anniversary - make a donation to the Church Fresco fund and the gift will be remembered every time you come to Church. Please be generous for to the beautification of our Church. All donation should be given to Reader John (Rick) Schler. Thank you!

Also, during Father Theodore's stay with our parish. It would be appreciated if parishioner's would bring him a meal, or invite him to your home for dinner or take him out to eat at a restaurant. It would be nice for members of the parish to express their appreciation to Fr. Theodore. Thank you!

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## NEW PARISHIONER'S

You may have noticed some new faces in Church. Please welcome these people to our parish - make them feel welcome. Sit with them during Coffee Hour, tell them about our Sisterhood, Church School, Choir etc. Be friendly, so these people will be glad to return.



## **YOUTH CHOIR WEEKEND**

We have been blessed to have the Eastern American Youth Choir Choose our Parish for this special weekend!

Well, its that time of year again! With Pascha being early this year, Prodigal Son weekend is right around the corner. It seemingly has become a yearly tradition for the EAD( Eastern American Diocese Youth Choir) r to hold an event on this particular Sunday, and we are looking to continue this. This year our event will take

place at the Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God in Albany, NY. We will sing both the All Night Vigil on Saturday night as well as the Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning. We will be kicking off our choir week with the Tikhvin Gala Dinner hosted by the parish. All are encouraged to attend! More information will be posted on their website.

These choir weekends are a great opportunity to meet new people who share a similar love for music. We really hope that everyone can attend. Sleeping arrangements will be made for anybody who will be traveling. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out to Nikhon Schuler, Alexandra Pavuk, or Rd. Konstantine Ogora. We hope to see all of you there!

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## **GRATITUDE LECTURE - SUNDAY, JANUARY 21<sup>st</sup>**

Father Alexis Duncan has been asked to present a lecture on GRATITUDE at an Atlanta Orthodox Youth Sympsiom this Spring. The Parish Council has requested that he present the same lecture to our Parish. The lecture will take place on Sunday, January 21<sup>st</sup> following Coffee Hour. The lecture is geared towards our Youth and is being given on the day the Children are hosting the Coffee Hour. We hope that everyone will come. We all have so much for which to be grateful. We are blessed with so many good things, it is nice to be reminded that we should be thankful to God for ALL of these things.

## **LENTEN LECTURE - THIRD WEEK OF LENT - SUNDAY OF THE CROSS**

Reader Alfred Kentigern Siewers is Associate Professor and Chair of English at Bucknell University, where his work focuses on medieval and nature literature, and on literature written in resistance to totalitarianism. He is a Chicago native and former newspaper journalist who has lived in central Pennsylvania with his family for 15 years. A graduate of the Pastoral School of the Diocese of the Midwest, he is warden of Holy Protection Russian Orthodox Mission Parish in Lewisburg, PA, where he helps conduct reader services under Fr. Claude Vinyard, who serves both there and at Christ the Saviour Church in Sugar Notch, PA. He and his wife Olesya (originally from Viatka, Russia) have two boys, Nicholas and Kevin Seraphim, who have been attending St. Seraphim Camp.

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## **PARKING AT THE CHURCH PARKING LOT**

In the past, parishioners have parked their cars in the Church Parking lot when they go on vacation or for other reasons. During the Winter months, if you are leaving your car in the Church Parking lot, please park it in the far corner - near the green donation box. If the snow plow needs to clear the parking lot, it is difficult to do so with cars parked in the lot. Thank you!

# FINANCIAL STATUS OF OUR CHURCH

- Although we have been blessed to have been able to regularly meet our monthly mortgage payments, there are other financial obligations we have to take care of.
- Fr. Theodore is returning in February, our Fresco Fund does not contain enough fund to pay for this next stage of work. .
- Our operational expenses have been increasing. The costs of snow plowing and lawn mowing continue to go up. Many of the appliances and fixtures in the hall were previously used when we first installed them. A number of these items require too frequent maintenance and must soon be replaced.
- At some point in the next few years, we will need to repair our parking lot and replace the 28 year old roof on our church hall.
- Although we now have about 100 regularly attending adults at church services, only two-thirds are dues paying members and only one third pledge regular extra amounts which we rely upon to pay our mortgage expenses.
- At this point, we need to get more people involved in contributing towards our financial obligations. We get zero financial help from our diocese, our own parishioners are responsible for all of our expenses. Any amount contributed for this effort, no matter how large or small, would be truly appreciated!

To that end, we have more information on financial situation in the back of the church. Attached are pledge forms for those who are interested. Our treasurers and council members will be available to answer any questions you may have at coffee hour. Thank you for support of OUR church.

**\*\*\*\* DUE TO THE ABOVE - THE PARISH COUNCIL HAS INCREASED THE AMOUNT OF MONTHLY DUES FOR WORKING MEMBERS OF THE PARISH TO \$30.00 PER MONTH. RETIRED PERSONS - REMAINS \$10 a Month; NON-WORKING \$5.00 a Month. THANK YOU..**

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## 2018 Pledge Form

**Nativity Mother of God Russian Orthodox Church  
617 Sand Creek Road Albany, NY 12205**

Name all Orthodox Christian Adults ( older than 18 ) of your household.

In gratitude of God's blessings I/we make the following commitment to Nativity of Mother of God Russian Orthodox Church for 2018.

I/we pledge the following monthly/yearly ( circle one ) amount to:

Church general account (clergy compensation, utility bills, insurance, rectory mortgage, maintenance, diocese dues, candles, etc. ) : \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Church mortgage & fresco fund account : \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I WILL FREELY FULFILL MY FINANCIAL PLEDGE DURING 2018

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Sign: \_\_\_\_\_



## **PROJECT TIKHVIN AND THE TIKHVIN GALA DINNER**

The monastery of the Entrance of the Most Holy Mother of God has stood near the banks of the Tikhvinka River since the 14th century. This place was chosen by the Mother of God Herself as a resting place for the Tikhvin Icon of the Mother of God, painted by the Holy Evangelist Luke. The monastery has seen invasions, battles, civil upheavals and closure by the godless in our last century. The present cathedral was built by Tsar Ivan the Terrible. Project Tikhvin has taken up the task of providing the youth of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad the opportunity to journey to Tikhvin to assist in restoring this ancient and holy place. The Project is charged with raising the necessary funds to enable this restoration. All those who work with this project do so on a purely voluntary basis and receive no salary. The Project is blessed by His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion, the First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. It is administered by the St. Seraphim Camp.

To help with the cost of the trip and to keep expenses of our youth volunteers at a minimum, we need to raise money for this project. Therefore, we are holding **the TIKHVIN GALA DINNER on FEBRUARY 2nd, 2018**. Please save this date, and plan to attend. It is **NOT** only an evening for our youth, but for all ages.

**Project Tikhvin  
Gala Dinner  
Friday, February 2, 2018 - 7:00 PM**

**Nativity of the Mother of God Orthodox Church  
617 Sand Creek Road  
Albany, NY 12205**

**\$30.00 per person  
Payment due before January 21, 2018**

- \* Chef Prepared Dinner**
- \* Live Entertainment by Sasha Ogora**
- \* Silent Auction**

**A Fundraising Event - All proceeds to benefit sending youth to Russia to work on the restoration of historical sites.**

**Hope to see many of our parishioners there to help support this wonderful project and opportunity for our youth.**

**Anyone interested in donating a basket or item for the Silent Auction is asked to contact Christna Fedorov DiLello or Urij Tabunchikow.**

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## CHURCH SCHOOL CLASSES

We hope everyone will enjoy their Nativity break from Church School Classes. We would like to thank all of the teachers, parents and especially the students for attending the classes held on Sunday mornings at 9:00 am. We hope that this upcoming semester will be even more successful with more children attending the classes. It is vital that we instruct our children in our faith. That they have an understanding of Church services, traditions, Saints and all of the Holy days celebrated by the Orthodox Church. To ensure that our children have a good foundation it is vital that they participate in Church School. We will begin classes again in February - the dates will be announced via e-mail to the parish as well as in the February Newsletter. Please be attentive to the dates and PLEASE make every effort possible to have your children attend the classes. If you have any questions regarding the Church School, please contact Matushka Anna, or speak to one of the teachers: Reader John (Rick) Schuler who teaches the older children; Matushka Cecelia Soloviev who teaches the middle school children; Tasia Fedorov who teaches the upper elementary school children or Matushka Anna who teaches the youngest class. Thank you.

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## SISTERHOOD NEWS

THERE WILL BE NO SISTERHOOD MEETING IN THE MONTH OF JANUARY - The Sisterhood Meeting for FEBRUARY will be held on February 11th.

**COFFEE HOURS** - If you are not a Coffee Hour hostess and would like to join in providing a meal for our parishioners, please contact RaeLynn (Anastasia) Gonyea - Sisterhood President. If you stay for Coffee hours, you know that this meal is enjoyed by many. It is a great opportunity for our little children to play and for the adults to gather and socialize. We are indeed a Church Family, and Coffee hours give us a wonderful opportunity to interact and share in each others lives.

**COFFEE HOUR HOSTESSES:** Hostesses are reminded to please clean the kitchen, washing all dishes and PLEASE put them away. **Please take any used towels home to wash and return to the hall. Please make sure all trash is removed from the hall, kitchen and bathrooms. Make sure the bathrooms are cleaned (trash removed, toilets clean, toilet paper & paper towels replenished) and the hall floor is swept and the entire floor mopped. If unable to mop the entire floor - at least make sure any dirty spots, food spills, etc are mopped. There is no one who presently cleans the Church Hall on a regular basis, so we are relying on our Coffee Hour hostesses and parishioners to help keep the hall clean. Also, please ensure that the ovens are off; the pilot lights on the stove are lit and the exhaust fan above the stove is turned off. THANK YOU.**

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## NATIVITY - ADOPT A FAMILY

Ever year at this time, our Parish has a collection for a family in need. We are all fortunate to have roofs over our heads, food to eat, loving family and friends, and a beautiful Church where we may attend the Divine Services. Let us be thankful and grateful for all of God's blessings. Let us also be generous to those who may need a helping hand this year, especially during this Nativity Season - the season of giving and love.



## EXPLANATION OF THE NATIVITY ICON

*The most wise Lord comes to be born,  
Receiving hospitality from His own creatures.  
Let us also receive Him, That this divine Child in  
the cave may make us His guests In the paradise  
of delights!*

The Birth of Christ has always been celebrated and hymned by Christians in some way or other, as it is central to the Faith. The Word of God in past times may have appeared as an angel of the Lord, or the divine fire of the burning bush, but now, from this time onwards, He has become one of us; and not just as a fully-grown man descended from Heaven, but in humility God is born of a woman, and comes to us as a tiny, speechless, infant. This is what is shown in the Nativity Icon, and around this central historical event other stories surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ are depicted.

The common form of the Nativity Icon, with few variations, dates from around the 15th century,

though it draws upon sources much older: the Old Testament Prophecies, the New Testament Gospel accounts, and ancient narratives on the life of the Virgin Mary.

### **The New Testament in the Nativity Icon**

The child-Christ and His mother are shown in a cave, surrounded by impossibly sharp, inhospitable, rocks which reflect the cruel world into which Jesus was born. The Gospels record that Joseph and Mary could not find a room at any inn when they came to take part in the census at Bethlehem, and so Jesus was laid in a manger, an animal's feeding trough. Common to the time, animals were not sheltered in wooden barns, but in caves and recesses in the hills, and so this "stable" is shown in the Icon.

High in the skies is a star which sends down a single shaft towards the baby Jesus. This star is being followed by the Magi, the wise Persians from the East, who are bearing gifts to the Christ. But they are shown in the distance, still on their journey. They are not there.

Thronged in the skies are a host of angels bringing the glad tidings of the birth of the world's Saviour. On the right, the shepherds – people not regarded by anyone else – are the first to be given the Good News of Jesus' birth. But they are also shown outside of the cave, still by their flocks. They too are not at Christ's side yet.

Besides His mother, the only company Jesus Christ has in the first few hours of His earthly life are a lowly ox and donkey. This is the humility of God's incarnation on earth.

## **The Old Testament in the Nativity Icon**

The humbleness of Christ's origins should not surprise us, as the manner of His birth was prophesied many hundreds of years prior to the event. The presence of the Ox and the Donkey in the Nativity icon fulfills one of many prophecies in the Old Testament book of Isaiah:

"The ox knows his owner, and the donkey his master's crib" (Isaiah 1:3) . Here the animals are also shown providing warmth to Jesus by their breath.

Also found somewhere in most icons of the Nativity is a "Jesse Tree." Named after an Old Testament patriarch, the tree's presence is to remind us of another fulfilled prophecy from Isaiah:

"A shoot shall sprout from the stump (tree) of Jesse and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him" (Isaiah 11:1-2). In the flesh, Jesus can trace his ancestry through both His mother and adoptive father Joseph, all the way back to Jesse. This lineage is also sometimes shown in Icons of the Jesse Tree.

## **Other Ancient Texts in the Nativity Icon**

Another important source for the story of Jesus' birth is the Protoevangelium of James, a 2nd century text which describes the life of the Virgin Mary. This naturally includes a description of Christ's Nativity, and the account is more detailed than those found in the Gospels. According to the Evangelium, Joseph brought along two women – a midwife and a woman called Salome – to help with the birth of Jesus. Salome is identified with a woman who later became a disciple of Christ, was the mother of the Apostles James and John, and was one of the women who discovered the empty tomb after Christ's resurrection.

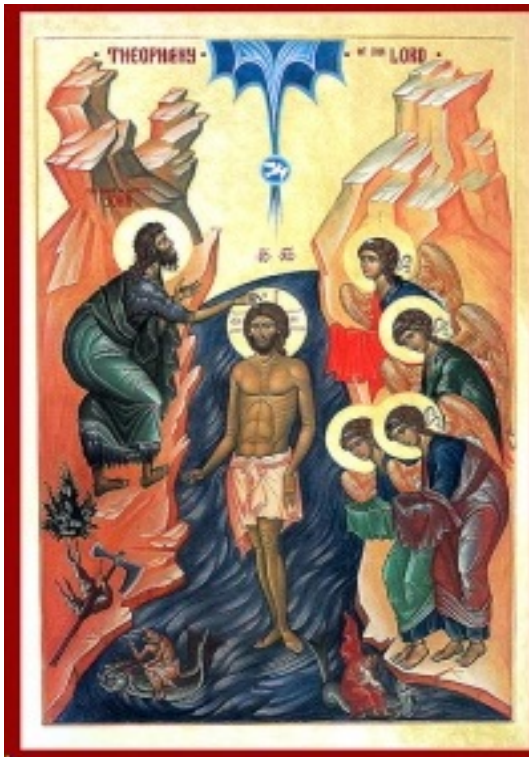
But where is Joseph? Unlike the well-known Nativity scenes in the West, in Orthodox Icons Joseph is usually found in the bottom of the icon, away from his betrothed and her Son. Sometimes seen listening to an old man, Joseph looks troubled. He is beset with new doubts regarding this birth, and these doubts are delivered to him by Satan in the form of an old man, as recorded in the Protoevangelium. The devil suggests that if the infant were truly divine He would not have been born in the human way. These arguments, which ultimately did not cause Joseph to stumble, have constantly returned to trouble the Church, and are the basis of many heresies regarding Who Christ was and is. In the person of Joseph, the icon discloses not only his personal drama, but the drama of all mankind, the difficulty of accepting that which is beyond reason, the Incarnation of God.

As well as declaring the glorious and joyous news of the Birth of Christ, the icon also acknowledges, as do the hymns of the Church, the great mystery of this event.

*How is He contained in a womb, whom nothing can contain?  
And how can He who is in the bosom of the Father  
be held in the arms of His Mother?  
This is according to His good pleasure,  
as He knows and wishes.  
For being without flesh,  
of His own will has He been made flesh;  
and He Who Is,  
for our sakes has become that which He was not.  
Without departing from His own nature  
He has shared in our substance.  
Desiring to fill the world on high with citizens,  
Christ has undergone a twofold birth.*



## THEOPHANY ICON EXPLAINED



From the first century of the Christian Church, there has always been “The Festival of Lights”. In the depth of Midwinter, this feast celebrated the advent of the Son of God’s coming into the world as Jesus Christ, and His early years up to and including His baptism in the Jordan, which heralded the beginning of Jesus’ ministry on earth.

Over the centuries, the various aspects of Christ’s early years were separated into individual feasts on different days: His Nativity, the Visitation of the Magi, His presentation in the Temple, and His circumcision. But the principal event of the Feast of Lights – Christ’s Baptism – continued to be commemorated on the 6th/19th of January. Why is this event so important?

The event depicted in the icon is that described in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke; here is Matthew’s version:

*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.”*  
(Matthew 3:13-17)

This, then, is the Epiphany (revelation) of the Holy Trinity, otherwise known as Theophany which literally means a “revelation of God” in Greek (Θεοφάνεια; the Russian is Богоявление and means the same).

The paradox that Jesus Christ might be revealed as God through an act of submittal to a mere man, John, is shown well in the Icon. Though John is baptizing Christ, it is the former who is shown bent over in reverence to the latter. In other icons, John is shown with his face turned toward heaven and beholding the miracle of the Theophany; either way, despite being the baptizer, he is not central to the scene. Near to John is a tree with an axe laid at the root, recalling John’s own preaching to those who came to him: “And now also the ax is laid to the root of the trees: therefore every tree which brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.” (Matt 3:10). Present in the icon, this shows that whilst the Baptizer must now “decrease so Christ may increase”, John’s teachings and role are not done away with now the Holy Trinity has been revealed. On the opposite bank to John the Baptist, angels wait invisibly to receive the newly baptized Christ and clothe Him. And so, on the left is the forerunner of Christ, John, with his sermon of repentance represented by the tree and axe; on the right, the angels wait with reverence to accept the newly revealed Son of God. In the middle – the moment of revelation itself.

Jesus Christ, despite being the one submerged in the Jordan, is shown as though standing up and staring straight at us. His body is depicted as strong and beautiful, as it is understood classically, and in older icons He is naked. Christ appears almost as wide as the river Jordan itself; indeed: it is as though it is Jesus Christ, rather than the river, which cuts a swathe through the rocky wilderness on either side.

The Icon of the Theophany, as well as depicting the Holy Trinity, also answers the question of John the Baptist: I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me? The answer is in what Jesus does with His hands. Whilst in Western art, like this painting by Da Vinci, Jesus is shown as submitting to John's authority, in Orthodox icons Christ's hands are not shown in prayer, but in a sign of blessing. Rather than the waters of Jordan cleansing Christ, it is Christ Who cleans the waters. This is why in the bottom of most Theophany Icons, little creatures appear to be fleeing from the feet of Christ. This is a reflection of the words of the Psalmist regarding the Messiah (Christ): "the sea saw and fled, the Jordan turned back" (Psalm 114:3).

This is the depth and profundity of the Baptism of Christ; the feast of lights which revealed the Holy Trinity, and cleansed the waters of baptism so that we, like the fishes shown in the icon, may swim in pure waters.

Of old, the river Jordan  
Turned back before Elisha's mantle at Elijah's ascension.  
The waters were parted in two  
And the waterway became a dry path.  
This is truly a symbol of baptism  
By which we pass through this mortal life.  
Christ has appeared in the Jordan to sanctify the waters!