

**THE SACRED WATER OF THE JORDAN RIVER**

**The Baptism of our Lord is closely identified with the Jordan River, a body of water that had great significance for the Israelites long before this mysterious event. After wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, this was the river God’s chosen people crossed to enter the “promised land.” It was from the banks of the Jordan that the Prophet Elias was taken up into heaven by a chariot of fire. It was also in these waters that Elisha – the successor of Elias – commanded that Naaman the Syrian wash and be cleansed of leprosy. The Second Book of Kings chronicles how Naaman was skeptical of this, claiming that the rivers of Damascus could be used to cleanse him just as well. Nevertheless, he did as Elisha instructed him to do and he was healed.**

**This was the river to which Christ came to be baptized. It was already “sacred water” for the Israelites, and our Lord’s baptism in the Jordan served to reinforce Christ’s claim to be the Messiah. There is no doubt that its relevance was not lost on the pious Jews of His time. Nor should its importance be lost on us either.**

**We cannot cross over into the “promised land” of God’s heavenly kingdom unless Christ leads us there, just as Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan. Only Christ can wash and cleanse us of our spiritual illnesses. He is our only source of spiritual healing – just as Naaman had only one source of assistance for his physical ailments.**

**As we celebrate the great Feast Day of Theophany, may we remember how the Jordan River was sanctified forever by Christ’s baptism in its waters.**