



# Homilies on the Feast of Epiphany



## The Epiphany Feast

The Feast of the Lord's Baptism

By St. Jacob of Serugh

Preparation and Commentary  
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St. George Church, Sporting, Alexandria  
Queen St. Mary & Prince Tados  
Coptic Orthodox Church, NJ, USA

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Preparation and Commentary

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## Christ's Baptism and the Eternal Wedding Feast

Since the fall of Adam and Eve, humans have felt that God dwells in His heavens amid His greatness, might and glory and awaits human mistakes in order to punish them. He is the Holy One who cannot stand the weakness of human beings, the inhabitants of the earth, who are unable to get rid of the desires of the flesh, the corruption of the emotions, and the impurity of the senses! Therefore, all that preoccupied mankind was to soothe the divine wrath and avoid His vengeance.

The revelations and laws of God came to confirm God's longing for them, and His desire to adhere to them and to their fellowship with Him. He does not turn away from them in His heavens but descends to them and searches for them to bring them close to Him.

St. Jacob of Serugh sees in his homily: "In the coming of the Lord to Mount Sinai and the symbol of the Church", that the Lord called Moses the Prophet to announce to him that he wants to betroth the people to himself, so that they will be His holy bride. He presented to her the Ten Commandments as gems to adorn the bride. Unfortunately, she preferred the golden calf to Him as her bridegroom. He said about them: "They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your God, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'" (Exodus 32:8).

Now the Word of God has become incarnate; He has descended to earth as a groom to His betrothed, asking her hand for Himself, sanctifying and beautifying her, to carry her to His heavens, that is, His majesty, to share His glories with him.

In his homily on the Baptism of Christ and the Holy Baptism, St. Jacob of Serugh, highlighted the following:

1. The Lord, the light of the world, descended to our earth to enlighten and renew His creation (the people). He passed through the stages of human life like every human being: The first stage took place in the womb of the Virgin Mary by birth, and the second stage took place when John baptized Him into the Jordan River.
2. John the Baptist did not see the Son until he baptized Him, so that it would not be said that John is Christ's friend. John testified that Christ was the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
3. John baptized Him in silence lest Satan should recognize Him. But the Father spoke, saying: This is my beloved Son, so that the bride might know the truth about her Bridegroom, confirming to her the divinity of Christ. The Father spoke personally and did not use the angels' voice or other natural voices, as in all other apparitions of the Lord.

4. Christ sanctified the waters, and baptism did not sanctify Him like humans. The Holy Spirit did not descend to sanctify the water, but rather after Jesus was baptized, for us to enjoy the appearance of the Holy Trinity, His wonderful love for humanity and His plan for us on the eternal level.
5. St. Jacob of Serugh speaks about the baptisms in the law that did not grant us the descent and the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in us.
6. St. Jacob of Serugh compares between the baptisms of the Mosaic law, the baptism of John, and the baptism of Christ, which is the true baptism. All the baptisms that came before it symbolized it.
7. The bride was waiting for Christ and got to know Him after His baptism, and soon Christ began to fight the prince of the power of the air in the wilderness, for his bride.
8. St. Jacob of Serugh offers us a serious dialogue with the daughter of the Hebrews, who will be replaced by the Church, the daughter of peoples.
9. Christ betrothed the Church, washed it with water from the dirt of idolatry, and put on her the robe of glory in the bosom of baptism.
10. The church thought that John the Baptist was the bridegroom, so John explained to her that he was just the voice crying out before the coming Bridegroom Who was before him and that he did not deserve to loosen His sandal's strap. John was astonished because he put his hand on the flame and did not burn.
11. Christ taught John to baptize Him in silence. He did not know in whose name should he (John) baptize Him, should he baptize Him in the name of the Father? He is with Him, or in the name of the Holy Spirit, who testifies for Him?
12. The Church asks David and Zechariah to explain their prophecies about the Son whose name shines and at whose presence the River Jordan trembled.
13. The priesthood of Levi ended with John the Baptist, and the priesthood of the New Testament began with the baptism of Christ. The Levitical priesthood did not add anything to the nature of Christ.
14. The church asked St. Jacob of Serugh to compose a homily and so he could not remain silent, but he calls for the bride's feast, and he inquires saying: What is baptism? He enumerates its characteristics based on the Old and New Testaments.
15. Baptism makes us children of the unapproachable God. Baptism became our mother instead of Eve. The baptized ones call God his/her 'father' and becomes the brother/sister of Christ.

16. St. Jacob of Serugh considers his homily on baptism a melody in which he rejoices in victory of the Church.
17. In his homily "On the Baptism of our Savior in the River Jordan", the saint introduces us to everyone's participation in the wonderful wedding feast:
  - a. The **Father's voice** rends the heaven asunder and testifies to Him.
  - b. **The Holy Spirit** moved as the finger of the Father and settled on Christ so that no one would think that the Father's voice refers to someone other than Jesus Christ.
  - c. **The non-rational nature** offered Him praise in her language. The clouds gathered to surround the bridegroom, and the mists became like curtains for His royal palace as He ascended from the river. Lightning sparked on the earth because the Sun of righteousness descended into the waters of the Jordan to sanctify it.
  - d. **The waters were blown as of the fire of the Holy Spirit** to proclaim the sanctification of baptism for the coming generations.
  - e. The church's amazement corresponded to the astonishment of the heavenly ones as the Lord asked His servant to place his hand upon His head.
  - f. In silence and bewilderment, the Baptist extended his hand while watching the unique heavenly rite of the baptism of Christ.
  - g. The church summoned some Old Testament prophets to explain to her what they had previously prophesized about this event.
18. By the descent of Christ to the Jordan to be baptized, he ended the authority of the Levitical priesthood that he had handed over to Moses on Mount Sinai and introduced the new priesthood to His disciples and apostles.

# A Unique Heavenly Wedding

## The Groom Prepares the Wedding at the Jordan in the Wilderness

St. Jacob of Serugh imagines how Christ went to the River Jordan where crowds of people gathered from multiple places to repent of their sins and accept baptism from St. John the Baptist. But what a difference between them and Him! They come in repentance and mourn over their sins, and He is the Messiah, the Lord, the King of Kings. He has come to hold a joyous wedding feast that includes all nations, not just one, and excludes no one.

The multitudes came to John in order to be washed from their weaknesses, their abominations, and the corruption that had befallen them from idolatry and spiritual adultery. They carried the stench of the burnt offerings that they offered to the idols, and therefore, the Bridegroom poured the water of baptism on them that they may immerse themselves in it, and so that by His Holy Spirit, He may replace their stench with His marvelous heavenly scent. *He Himself descended to the River Jordan to cover His bride with His righteousness in the womb of baptism, so she would become the Father's daughter, the incarnate Word's bride – He who is the King of kings – and the Holy Spirit's temple.* Indeed it is a unique and glorious heavenly wedding banquet!

*Christ, the Bridegroom prepared the marriage feast for the church of the nations and the world became aware of the wedding feast He had furnished for her [the Church]*

*The Royal Son wished to betroth the afflicted one [the Church] and He sent her to go to the fountain to wash away her dust.*

*He saw the persecuted (Church) that was weak desiccated and wearied, then He mixed waters and sent her to wash herself and then to be betrothed.*

*He had regard for her beauty that was altered by the incense of idols; and He poured out rushing streams of the river upon her face to brighten her color.*

*He sent her down first to the tested waters as He betrothed her in order to purge away fornication from her by sanctification.*

*That smell of the holocausts sacrificed was concentrated in her, but He caused to pass unto her the wholesome waters to make her body fragrant.*

*She was made corrupt by the foulness of the oblations.*

*He besprinkled sanctity upon her so that she might be cleansed by it from defilement.*

*In the womb of baptism, He placed the robe of glory and He sent the bride to go down to clothe herself from the waters.<sup>1</sup>*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob of Serugh. *Select Festal Homilies*, FH VI.

## **St. John the Baptist summons and adorns the bride**

As the crowds rallied around St. John the Baptist, St. Jacob of Serugh refers to them as the “daughter of destitute parents” because she had deviated from the worship of God, the Grantor of heavenly treasures, surrendered herself to Satan and become like a beggar and a destitute one.

This “daughter of destitute parents” came to the Baptist, the Groom's friend. The Groom called John to preach before he had even been conceived in the womb of St. Elizabeth, and he was to be the forerunner and baptizer who prepares the way for Him (Mark 1: 2). The Baptist summoned the multitudes to enjoy the divine treasure with his call: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3:2) The Baptist beckoned to the young girl (the human race) to adorn herself with repentance and rejoice in her faith in the Groom, the coming king.

*He called His faithful servant, son of a barren woman, and sent him beforehand to go and carry along the adornment to the bride before He comes.*

*John (the Baptist) went out and carried the riches of the great treasure; so that he might adorn the daughter of the poor as he was ordered.*

*He carried along and opened the trunk of the Spirit over the waters and brought out the garments to clothe the church in sanctity.*

*He showed her wonderful garments, that had not been seen by her, which had been made ready on the web of the divine abode.*

*The turbulent one captivated her through his intimate conversation bearing promises, as he proclaimed the kingdom of heaven to the vagrant's daughter.*

*"Behold, the kingdom is close at hand, that is of heaven.*

*The Bridegroom himself has moved to come to you so that you might rejoice in Him."*

*He called the girl and she presented herself to be adorned because she had learned that it was the royal Bridegroom who would be coming to her.<sup>1</sup>*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **The Prophet Isaiah, the Bride's Teacher**

The crowds recognized the character of St. John the Baptist whom Isaiah had prophesied about, saying: “‘Comfort, yes, comfort My people!’ says your God. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill brought low. The crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth;” (Isaiah 40: 1-4, Matthew 3:3).

The multitudes became assured of his identity and perceived that despite his life in the

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob of Serugh. *Select Festal Homilies*, FH VI.

dry wilderness, his words were exceedingly rich. He looked humble, but his words resounded powerfully in everyone's ears. He owned nothing but preached vigorously about the heavenly treasures from above.

*She invoked Isaiah to learn from him about John [the Baptist],  
"Who is this one who announces to me the kingdom on high?  
Come, O Prophet, come, explain to me about the herald because I need to learn the truths from you.  
I am accepting your word because it is for my sake; For, behold, I have heard the speech of your  
discourse since a long time back.  
You assured me about conversion in your prophecy.  
Come, see, may be the time has come that I may enter into it [conversion].  
See, what are the tidings of this one who proclaims serious matters, while he himself appears in  
poverty.  
His appearance is of renunciation but rich is the word of his proclamation.  
His attire is humble, but his word is strong in the ears of all.  
The man, when I saw him, was not speaking according to his stature and the promise that he sowed  
in my ears is not lowly as he is.  
While he possessed utterly nothing, his word is magnificent.  
He wanders in the desert and announces to me the kingdom on high.  
Tell me, prophet, if he is genuine, I shall hear his words and if he is not true let me not go astray  
through him as at other (times).  
Your Lord is coming, and I am preparing to enter before Him.  
Reveal the truth to me, do not persist yourself with accusation."<sup>1</sup>*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **Isaiah responds to the Church**

The prophet Isaiah affirmed that the preacher on the banks of the River Jordan is the friend and faithful servant of the bridegroom, and he asked the church to heed him, to go down and wash because this John prepares the way for the coming King who comes as humanity's bridegroom.

*Isaiah approached to teach the Church about John the Baptist,  
"Since he is a son of the mystery of the Bridegroom, your Lord, accept his words.  
This is the voice that cries in the wilderness before the Son of the King;  
Prepare, O you prepare, the way for the Lord in faith.  
Go, descend, and be purified, do not excuse yourself from the herald.  
He makes smooth the steep place so as to set in order the way for the King who is coming."*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob of Serugh. *Select Festal Homilies*, FH VI.



## **The Church assumed the Groom was John**

The bride approached the Groom's friend and he washed, purified, cleansed, and sanctified her with his preaching of repentance and his declaration of the coming Bridegroom. She stood in amazement at his attractive personality, thinking that he is her Groom, her Betrothed! At the time when the true Messiah remained hidden from her eyes in His incarnation, she assumed that John – the servant – was the king himself.

The Groom's friend was sincere in his service and loudly he cried out, "I am not the bridegroom!" He wanted to turn her eyes away from him and to the Bridegroom with his words: "whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose" (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1: 7; Luke 3: 16). He preserved the supremacy of his Lord and clearly confessed, "He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me" (John 1: 15).

*The Church, the royal bride, approached towards John and he began washing, cleansing, polishing and sanctifying her.*

*He became someone trustworthy to her since he labored for her adornment as much as he could.*

*He taught and made her wise so that she might be corrected, for she was confused.*

*She heard his voice and gave heed after his words for she supposed that he was the Bridegroom to whom she was betrothed.*

*She took hold of the servant affectionately, as though he were the Lord, because the Messiah was concealed from her among the tribes.*

*The faithful servant saw that the betrothed bride clung to him, and he began to speak out his mind and called but, "I am not the Bridegroom".*

*He thrust her away from him so that she might not be led astray by him because he was (only) a servant, but he encouraged her to remain in the expectation of the Bridegroom while He was distant.*

*He humbled himself saying, "I am not even worthy of His sandals." as a faithful servant, in order to safeguard the presidency for his Lord.*

*He noticed the young girl who set her eye upon him who was a Nazirite and in haste he cut off the cause of scandal from her mind.*

*He bound her in agreement to wait for the Bridegroom and not to look upon him, proclaiming to her "He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me."*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **The Church and the Baptist await the True Bridegroom**

Hearing John's frank and candid words, many of those seeking the truth and longing for the Messiah Savior stood alongside him. Their eyes and hearts eagerly sought the coming Bridegroom. Many were ready to welcome the true Bridegroom, but what are His signs?!

John's testimony about his Master, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1: 9), raised numerous questions in the depths of their hearts. Yet no one

dared to ask him publicly: How do we know who the Bridegroom is?!

St. Jacob of Serugh says that just as the incarnate Word of God came to reveal His love to His bride, the forerunner prepared her to stand by the waters and await Him with open arms, so she will be ready to receive Him when He comes forth from His baptism.

*She began gazing until she would perceive Him who was coming to her, as she was examining the baptized one after another.*

*She herself was casting her eye for a moment upon many so that she may perceive among them the Only-Begotten to whom she is betrothed.*

*When someone was descending for baptism the crowds surrounded him in order to take notice of him lest perchance, he might be the Messiah who is coming.*

*The Church gathered herself and was present in the desert with John Fixing (her eyes) upon the wedding guests to see who the Bridegroom is.*

*She surrounded the river and cast her eyes along its rushing streams so as to receive the true Betrothed One from the waters.*

*The comely woman stood looking for the Bridegroom, when He would come, in order to enter with Him into the womb of the waters to be sanctified.*

*Her arms extended she waited for Him alongside the waters so that when He bathed, He might be received in a holy manner.*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **John awaits the Bridegroom**

Alongside all the other hearts ablaze to receive the true Bridegroom of whom John spoke, *the latter himself would raise his eyes to heaven during all baptisms, waiting to see and hear a testimony from heaven to the Bridegroom.* John realized that the Bridegroom was present, standing among the multitudes, and he inflamed the hearts of the crowds with yearning for Him!

*John too waited for Him as to when He would come so that through Him his [John's] own baptism would be made perfect as it was imperfect.*

*He was guarding the mystery that was between him and the Father and was looking for the Spirit who would bear witness concerning the True One.*

*When he was laying his hands to baptize those who were coming, he used to gaze upward on account on the contract that was there.*

*He made his eyes fly over many who were beside him in order to perceive the One whom the Spirit, when sent, would make manifest.*

*He was looking for that Bird, the mistress of heaven, that how it would descend and upon whom it would rest so as to bear witness.*

*He was expecting the swift wings carrying the tips (of the feathers) to see who is the one whom they would be receiving from the waters.*

*He thirsted to see the Bird that soars while not flapping its wings, for, when it would appear, it would be a witness concerning the redeemer.*

*He gave heed to the mighty voice of the Father to hear from it, the one concerning whom it was calling out, "He is my beloved Son. "*

*The bride stood with the true servant, the son of a barren woman and she looked out for him until he would point out that this is the Bridegroom.*

*She gives heed to him who shall declare to her regarding the Redeemer whereas he waits for the Father to bear witness to His Beloved One.*

*When someone came to descend to be baptized, she thronged around him, to see whether he is the Bridegroom, so that she might receive Him lovingly from him.*

*He said to the crowds, "Behold, among you stands the Bridegroom", and this saying kindled fire in the bride.*

*He proclaimed again, "I am not worthy, not even of His sandals", and again he kindled her with the love as well as the magnificence of Jesus.*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **Adorned in Repentance, the Bride and Guests receive their white garments from the Holy Spirit**

St. Jacob of Serugh contemplates the crowds as they immerse themselves in the waters of the Jordan to receive John's baptism of repentance. They receive an incomplete washing and partial purity because this baptism has not yet been made perfect despite its importance. Although they come out of the water adorned with the beauty of repentance, they are still naked and await the Messiah who will grant them spiritual garments, white garments, which symbolize the purity and glory that the heavenly Groom offers to His bride and makes her holy!

*The 'bride of light' thrust herself forward and stood by the side of John so that when he showed her who is the Bridegroom she might prostrate before Him.*

*The eye of the bride was cast upon everyone who was escorted to come to be baptized until He came up (from the water).*

*Thousands were baptized but there was no spirit descending upon them.*

*Tens of thousands were bathed and the river was cool without the descent.*

*The crowds descended and the waters remained common as they were (before).*

*Many came out of the water and the voice of the Father was hidden like Him.*

*And when the bride was made perfect with the ornaments of repentance,*

*And she was cleaned and came out from the waters of baptism,*

*And when the marriage feast was made ready with all its preparations,*

*Yet the Bridegroom alone held Himself back from coming to visit His own.*

*When the washing took place for the wedding-guests and it [the washing] had cleansed them, yet they were not clothed in the garments of the spirit from the water.*

*And when all the peoples were standing stripped and were waiting for the Bridegroom to come and*

*clothe them,*

*And when the impurity of the bride was washed away in the water and she came up and everyone looked for the white garments that the Bridegroom would bring,*

*And since baptism was deficient of forgiveness, and no one had received the Spirit of Holiness from the waters.*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **Why did the Groom seem to be late?**

As St. John started to baptize and the crowds gathered around him, it might seem as though the Bridegroom was late. *Why such a delay?*

1. In order to give John the opportunity to preach about Him and inflame hearts with longing to see the Bridegroom.
2. So that John may await Him at the riverbank until the Bridegroom who is hidden among the crowds reveals Himself.
3. St. Jacob of Serugh says that the waters of the Jordan surged with intense emotions and earnestly awaiting the coming Groom. When the river heard John's testimony, it overflowed with water and welcomed the Bridegroom! Silence then reigned after John's testimony, as though the river was wondering how Christ would be baptized in it. If we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of Christ or the Feast of the Divine Theophany (Epiphany), the saint says that the river itself rejoiced in such a unique and wondrous event.
4. The river's exuberance expressed the joy of the feast as its waters overflowed in expressive silence. The *Holy Spirit kindled its running streams and its waters were inflamed with the Holy Spirit's fire, not to sanctify the Holy Christ but to be prepared to embrace Him and become itself sanctified and able to birth children of God.*
5. John realized what was happening to the waters, that they were being prepared to receive the Bridegroom and His sanctification. That is why he cried out among the crowds and drove them back from the riverbank so that only the Bridegroom would descend in it. He also withdrew his hand so as not to lay it over the holy Bridegroom's head.
6. The crowd withdrew to make way for the Bridegroom so that He would come down alone in the River Jordan, being the only Bridegroom.

And when the entire wedding feast looked for the Bridegroom, where He might be, then the Royal Son came out from among the crowds to come to the river.

And when He was far off, the baptismal water became fervent in response to Him, and the river overflowed and silently proclaimed Him.

The Holy Spirit came out by itself and stood above the water and the heat of His power

kindled them [the waters].

His fire kindled among the rushing streams before He descended, and the river exulted with the great fervent heat of the Flame.

The baptismal water earnestly desired Him who had come to it, like the horn of anointing in response to David.

It was not that it became fervently heated at His arrival so as to render Him holy, for He is (already) holy;

It embraced Him so that its womb might be sanctified by Him.

It exulted in Him because He was its accomplishment and consummation and it stretched out its arm so that the holiness of the Son might be received into it.

John noticed the river which grew hot, and its abounding streams were transformed and he himself understood that that Holy One had come to baptism.

He drew back his hand so as not to baptize those who were coming, so that Christ, the Bridegroom, might be held back and stand alone.

He shouted among the crowds and drove them away from the riverside so that all might know that for whose sake baptismal waters grew hot.

He pushed back the flock to drive itself away from the fountain, in order to separate the Sacrificial lamb that it might go out from the flock.

He made signs to the wedding-guests and they offered Him place among the crowds in order that the Bridegroom might appear in glory to all the peoples.

The crowds that encircled the baptismal waters fled and the Son of the Kingdom stood alone as a solitary.

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **John announces Christ to the Church**

John announced to the church the person of her Bridegroom who takes away the sin of the whole world by offering Himself as a sin offering on her behalf.

*The trustworthy servant made haste to announce about the Redeemer to the Free-born woman.*

*He summoned the chaste woman to show her who her Lord is.*

*"O Church, from the beginning, I betrothed you this Bridegroom; in the hope of this One I have held you from the time I came.*

*This is the Lamb who presented Himself to become a sacrifice.*

*This one carries away the sin of the world in His being sacrificed.*

*Behold, for a long time I had assured you about this One.*

*In the name of this One I have been keeping you waiting for Him.*

*For this One I guarded you with watchful care like a faithful servant.*

*Thank Him on account of me for I had not left you behind to be captivated by me.*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## David explains to the church about the Groom

Just like St. John had testified about the bridegroom, King David the prophet picked up his harp and played a song at this wedding ceremony: a song that joyously recounts the secret of his joy. David sang what had previously been prophesied in Psalm forty-five (Psalm 44 LXX). *John testified about the Groom's person and David summoned the bride to unite with Him*, saying: "Listen, O daughter, Consider and incline your ear; Forget your own people also, and your father's house; So the King will greatly desire your beauty; Because He is your Lord, worship Him." (Psalms 45:10-11)

*And when the royal bride became instructed by John, behold, David, the singer of the Spirit, approached singing to her:*

*"Hear, my daughter and look and give heed to the glorious things.*

*Forget your people and those of your father's house because they are wavering.*

*Yes, in truth He is your Lord, approach Do not be wavering about the Redeemer and adore Him;*

*Do not be wavering about the Redeemer who has come to you."*

*The Church learned from John as well as from David and she became assured that He is the Bridegroom to whom she is betrothed.*

*She came near and stood there to see how He too is being baptized so that when He ascended from the waters she might fall down before Him.*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## John Refuses to Baptize Christ

Christ approached St. John the Baptist who drew his hands away from the Fiery One. How can straw approach and baptize a divine flame? How can the fleshly baptize the heavenly?

John did not expect that the One who sent Him forth would come Himself to be baptized! He immediately bowed his head in awe and reverence and confessed, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" The Baptist had thought his task was only temporary until the appearance of the holy One who will then baptize instead of him. After all, it would only be appropriate for him to leave this job to the powerful One who had sent him.

When Christ requested to be baptized, the Baptist was astounded. How can the King of kings ask for something like that from a lowly man? Why does the perfect One ask to be baptized?! He is One without sin who grants forgiveness, why does He need baptism? He is the heavenly High-Priest and the King of Kings! He is the One who sanctifies high priests, establishes kings, and sanctifies sinners! What can the insignificant River Jordan offer to the Creator of heaven and earth? The Baptist trembled and was humbled by the Lord's humility.

*Christ approached John to be baptized by Him John perceived Him and withdrew his hand from the Fiery One.*

*He bowed his head before the Son while saying to Him,*

*"It is I who ought to be baptized by you because you are the Holy One.*

*I was expecting you that I might commit baptism to you.*

*Behold, your treasure is for you and therefore allow me henceforth to take a little rest.*

*I looked after the office, but governorship is not mine.*

*Remain in your rank: I do not have authority over your power.*

*A king does not receive authority from a pauper;*

*It is from the crown the ranks of all powers proceed.*

*What is there in baptism that is not yours? and what is lacking in you so that you should descend to take (anything) from the water?*

*If it is pardon, it proceeds -from you for mankind; and if it is forgiveness, the forgiveness of debts too is yours.*

*If it is priesthood, the whole of it is in you because you are the High Priest and if it is kingship, you are the one who fastens the crowns for the kings.*

*Holiness proceeds from you to mankind: and if it is priesthood, behold the world exists by your right hand.*

*And seeing that the fullness of divinity is with you, what is there for the small river to accomplish in you?"*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **Christ is Baptized to Heal Adam**

The Lord Christ is never in need of anything because He is perfect in Himself and is not dependent on anything outside Him, St. John the Baptist realized. However, Christ's love is what brought Him to the world corrupted by sin. His desire is to find His image that humanity had lost. ***This is the pearl of great price that He wishes to restore back to humanity that had been corrupted by sin.*** He desires to clothe humanity with His righteousness in place of their nakedness, and it was His love that compelled Him to descend into the depths of Hades, seeking to restore His pearl to God the Father. It is His heart's desire! This way the Savior will restore Adam and his descendants to their inheritance.

*Our Lord says: "I am not lacking but in one thing,*

*The recovery of Adam who was lost from me is being sought by me.*

*Allow me to descend to seek Adam, the fair image and when I shall find him the whole of my desire shall be fulfilled.*

*It became a great search for me in his case and on account of that I have come and it would be a deficiency if I cannot find the lost one.*

*The recovery of him, that alone is what is lacking with me:*

*To regain Adam who was willing to perish at the hands of the evil one.*

*In this recovery my desire will come to perfection, because Adam is needed by me to enter into his inheritance.*

*Therefore, allow me to descend to cleanse the image that has become faded,*

*Lest it too would remain deficient, should you withhold me.*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **The Grace that summoned the Lord to Birth summons Him to Baptism**

We should not be surprised that Christ accepted baptism for our sake. In His tenderness and humility, the Word of God accepted to become an infant and descend into the Jordan for baptism. *Though John thought that he would be honoring Christ by refraining from baptizing Him, he would have honored Him much more by preventing His incarnation in the first place!* He who descended to the virgin's womb and became man came down into the waters of the Jordan and was baptized. The Word of God accepted the path of the incarnation and completed the way as a man even though while He is God in truth.

*That loving kindness which summoned me to come to birth, that has again called me to come to baptism too.*

*The great mercy has drawn me to descend to become a new born babe that (mercy) which drew me to descend to become baptized.*

*The baptismal womb is not narrower than the belly, and the water of the river is not more dark than the womb.*

*If you imagine that you are rendering honor to me, it would have been right for you to withhold me also from conception and nativity.*

*If it is a dishonor to me, which place is meaner, the womb of flesh or the dignity of baptism?*

*If you had withheld me from coming to conception while you were within your mother, it would have been easy for you to hold back so that I would not also be baptized, as I was sent.*

*If you had turned me away from that state of being born, come, turn me away from the order of baptism.*

*If you had removed me from the swaddling-clothes and I had not been wrapped round, drive away from me the waves of the river so that they do not cover me.*

*If you had blocked me from sucking the mean milk, you would have withheld me from the fountain lest I descend to it.*

*If you had withheld me from dwelling in the womb of Mary I would also have passed over myself from the womb of baptism.*

*And now I have travelled and come into this road of those born, unless I have perfected it, how is it possible that I should turn away from it.*

*Therefore it is becoming for me too, in accordance as I was sent, that the entire way upon which I have come down should be fulfilled in me.*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**



## **If You will not benefit from this Baptism, why undergo it?!**

According to St. John the Baptist, St. Jacob of Serugh affirms that the baptism of Christ is not because He is lacking something, as He is total perfection. It is humanity which needs baptism so it can be sanctified and enjoy its joys, but Jesus is the eternal and unchanging King of Kings.

*John shrank back trembled and he was terrified by the Royal Son.  
He adored Him and confessed, as he passionately made supplication,  
"Lord, I pray, I am not fit to approach you.  
The husk is too feeble to set its hand upon the Flame.  
How can a straw lay hold of the flame?  
Or a dry stick sets its hand upon coal or fire?  
The fervent heat of your energy has kindled itself in the river and behold,  
It has set it in fire, and how is that you will not burn out the hands of flesh?  
Nor is there any necessity that you be baptized by me, as though you were lacking,  
So that there should not be division in the world, (on the grounds) that you are deficient.  
Go Royal Son, redeem the captives, for behold, they are looking for you.  
You need to take no armor for yourself from the water.  
Your crown is eternal and not changed;  
From the treasury of baptism you shall not be filled.  
Press on with your journey: Behold, the captives thirst to see you;  
You are not looking for the company of anyone to go with you.  
You are born upon the purple of the Father from His essence;  
And you do not need to be clothed from this place and thus to redeem.  
It is the right time on the earth, do not delay from the redemption.  
Proceed forth, go on to snatch the captivity of the peoples from the persecutors.  
O King of kings, the kingdom of the Father and yours is the same;  
As regards power you will not get stronger from here.  
Behold the captivity passed beyond the inhabited land; why are you waiting?  
Go forward, turn back the captivity from the stumbling blocks through which it has gone out.  
Behold, the captors have plundered the region, hasten your course (of action);  
Proceed forth, go, and make the captivity return because it had gone out of your dominion.  
There is no addition in baptism with regard to yourself, and for what (purpose) then are you endeavoring to descend and wash?"*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **Christ affirms that Water requires Sanctification**

According to the words of Christ, St. Jacob of Serugh explains that our Christ was not in need of anything, but went down to the river to be baptized for the following reasons:

1. Humankind was in need of His baptism, because when the Holy One descended to the waters of the Jordan to be baptized, He sanctified baptism and opened the path of holiness to those who will believe in Him.
2. Believers need a weapon to resist the devil in their warfare against him. By the baptism of the Lord, He made of baptism an arsenal of spiritual weapons by which the believers could arm themselves in their battle against the devil.
3. By His descent, He established Himself as the leader of the battle against Satan and transformed the believers into brave warriors and heroes.
4. In baptism, water is transformed into flames as the Holy Spirit recreates us in the image of our Creator. The believers become imprints of the Holy Creator, and His image is inscribed upon them instead of their corruption<sup>1</sup>, for by their sin they had become the devil's property and had carried his image within them.
5. In baptism He was buried and raised, granting His believers immortality by the power of His resurrection.
6. Through Him the womb of baptism becomes fertile, giving birth to the children of God the Father, by whom the world is renewed.

*"Be silent, John, you are not making any addition upon me waters are in need of sanctification which will be provided by me.*

*I descended to the fountain not to take up a shield for myself but to forge mighty armor for warriors. I am anxious to cleanse humanity in the contest of battle so that everyone who comes to fight should fight like me.*

*I am instituting baptism as an armory; unless man has entered and clothed himself from it, he will not fight.*

*If I pass over and do not get baptized as you would withhold me, no one will be able to take up the armor from the waters.*

*As a commander I took up the leadership in the contest in order to be an example to the forces that are coming after me.*

*And if I turn aside from the road that I have taken hold of and come, again those after me too will pass by, as they have seen me (doing).*

*And if they do not equip themselves with my power from the waters, they will not encounter the great battle as diligent ones.*

*While I do not need the furnace of the waters, behold, I am entering so that humanity that is worn out should be recast with that stamp of mine.*

*I am stimulating them so that they should come to the fountain like me,*

*In order that with the coin of mine they shall be stamped spiritually.*

*To the tomb of water, I am bringing down humanity, so that I may make them immortal in the resurrection.*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Matthew 22:15-22

*I am making them enter into the moist womb so that it will conceive them and give them the new birth without birth pangs.  
And again, it is righteousness that I should be baptized by you, do not delay, come open the road because the world is expecting to be renewed by me. "*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **How can I baptize You like the rest, O Baptizer of All?!**

In the conversation that took place between Christ and St. John the Baptist, as envisioned by St. Jacob of Serugh, the Baptist says the following:

1. I had previously spoken with the multitudes approaching me to prepare them to be a bride for the Light. The bride's Groom is her Lord who comes to baptize her with the Holy Spirit and fire, and she is earnestly waiting for this baptism by Your hands! How can *You* be baptized by *me*?
2. I fear lest the masses think that I am lying to them or think that You are imperfect and in need for forgiveness, when You are the One who forgives sins!
3. I have learned the ritual of baptism of sinners, so what kind of ritual do I practice when I baptize You? Do I baptize You in the name of the Father when You are one with Him, inseparable from His bosom? Do I baptize you in the name of the Son, and You are the Son, the sanctifier of the water? Do I baptize you in the name of your Holy Spirit, and You are one with Him? How do I practice the ritual in the name of one of the three Hypostasis, as if I were to divide them while they are an inseparable and indivisible Trinity?

*The feeble one approached the Powerful One and besought Him:*

*"Lord, how is it possible that this would happen?*

*To the bride of light who was betrothed to you I said this:*

*The Bridegroom, your Lord, will baptize with the Holy spirit and fire.*

*Behold, she is looking to you that you may baptize her as I taught her,*

*And now how is it that she should approach to see that you are baptized by me?*

*I attested before her that I am not worthy, not even for your sandals and how shall I venture to place my hands upon your head?*

*In your name I have been baptizing her so that she shall be adorned by you.*

*And O Holy One, in whose name shall I baptize you? I do not know.*

*Behold, my word is the pledge to her and it is vigilant in her, because I had told her, 'He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit.'*

*And now how shall I change my word and change my saying, and baptize you, O Baptizer of all, with water as to others?*

*I will turn out to be (guilty of) falsehood and you will be belittled and the bride will think that there*

*is deficiency in her betrothed.*

*What shall I say when I baptize the Forgiver of Debts, and with what expressions shall I observe the rite of Baptism?*

*Shall I baptize the Son in the name of the Father! Behold, you are in His bosom and there is not a breath of slightest gesture between you and Him.*

*Shall I invoke the Son, the Sanctifier of waters, you only are here, and while being holy, why should you wash your holiness in baptism?*

*If you are baptized in the name of the Spirit, how is it possible that I shall sign the water separately because you are with the Spirit?*

*The Father is in His Son and the Son is wholly in His Father, and the Spirit who is from Him is One power without confusion.*

*And how shall I, the poor one, perform this, and set a division in that undivided harmony?*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **John baptizes Christ in silence**

St. Jacob of Serugh sees that Jesus asked the Baptist to place his hand on His head in utter silence, to listen and behold what the Father says and what His Holy Spirit declares.

*"John, pass over from questions and be silent.*

*Now let there be to you no disputation here on account of these matters.*

*I have come to baptism not because it should sanctify me,*

*Nor is it necessary that you should say something when I am baptized.*

*Come silently just place your hand on my head,*

*And it belongs to the Father what to say about His Son.*

*Stretch out your right hand so that in appearance it may come to me,*

*And without any of your word the Spirit will bear witness about the truth."*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **The Fiery Coal descends to be washed in the Waters!**

St. John the Baptist was trembling and silent, and allowed the Only-begotten Son of God to be baptized according to His will, and bowed down to Him. John trembled at the ineffable mystery and sensed the river's exuberance. *Just as Elizabeth had felt the joy of her baby John before the incarnate Word, so did John feel the Jordan's joy when the fiery Holy One descended into it.* He realized that the waters of baptism had become like a heavenly fire burning across generations. The baptism of this wondrous One astonished John just as it amazed the heavenly ones. It was as though lightning had surrounded Him in the water.

*And while the son of barren parents was trembling on account of all this,  
Then he let the Son be baptized according to His wish.*

*He approached trembling, adored while confessing, reached Him while being shaken.  
He was shaken and terrified but the power, that would not fail him, supported him.  
The Holy One came, and reached the waters to descend to be baptized,  
And his fire kindled among the waves and inflamed them.  
The river leaped for joy in the pure womb of baptism,  
Just as John in Elizabeth towards his Lord.  
The waters were inflamed by the lightening flames because the Living Fire had come for the baptism  
to be washed by them.  
It [the Living Fire] sets the ages on fire and casts its flame into the fountain and the glow from it  
kindled the river in holiness.  
The ordinary water was mixed with the splendor of holiness.  
Because from the Holy One mercy had gone out and kindled them.  
Coal of fire came down to be washed among the rushing streams and sprinkled there the fieriness  
of its holiness.  
The Flame came and took off the garments that it was wearing and descended to place fire in the  
water of baptism.  
The heavenly beings marveled at that ablution of the Flame when its glorious body was rinsed to  
sanctify the waters.  
The rushing streams of water were mingled with rays of light and the river had been set on fire  
with the brightness that dwelt in it.  
The tips of the waves were tossed about by the currents and the lightnings of flame surrounded it  
from all sides.  
An amazement and a great wonder struck the creation when the Flame descended to be baptized  
by John.  
The whole air grew warm and became inflamed in a holy manner because the Son of the Holy One  
descended for baptism though He was not lacking.*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **The Wondrous Divine Celebration of the Heavenly Groom**

When the Lord Jesus Christ descended into it, the River Jordan resembled a majestic heavenly ceremony.

1. Clouds of light sprang up and gathered over the River Jordan as though they desired to become the glorified Bridegroom's bridal chamber.
2. Mists gathered around Him like the veils of His royal palace, and they greeted Him when He came out from the river.
3. The Father spread glory and splendid lightning in the air to declare the glory of the Bridegroom, His Only Begotten Son.
4. Gorgeous colors appeared all around the river.
5. The Father's voice filled the heavens and declared that the Bridegroom is His Beloved

Son.

6. His Holy Spirit, being inseparable from Him, came upon Him in the form of a dove and affirmed that the Father's voice refers to the Lord of Glory, Jesus, as though the Holy Spirit is the Father's finger which points to His beloved Son.
7. As the Mosaic law requires the testimony of two or more witnesses, the Father and Holy Spirit testified to Him.

*The Spirit was present in the fire intensely in order to receive the Bridegroom in splendor from within the waters.*

*Fair glory had been kindled from all regions, and reverentially made solemn procession for the Son of the Kingdom.*

*Clouds of light floated from the extremities and stood still there, to become a bridal chamber for the glorious Bridegroom to descend to be baptized.*

*Dark clouds issued forth, like veils of the royal palace, so that when the Son of the King has been bathed, He could be received within them.*

*The Father stretched out chosen garments above the air;*

*Brightness and glory and flashes of astonishment as well as dark clouds.*

*He surrounded the river with amazing colors that were not apprehensible so that the marriage feast of the Only-Begotten Son should be exalted.*

*He rent the sky and raised His voice forcefully:*

*"Behold, this is my Son; this is truly my Beloved."*

*The Father and the Spirit together bore witness to the Only-Begotten so that legally they might give what is due to the same True One.*

*The voice of the Father and the Holy Spirit descended simultaneously, so that no one should reject their testimony when She appeared.*

*The voice of the Father tore asunder the sky and went out from it and there stood over the river a sea of boundless light,*

*The Spirit with its wings carried and brought a great glory and the desert overflowed with the brightness which was poured forth from the most high.*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **The Church Demands David to Interpret His Psalm (Psalm 77: 16-17)**

Such a magnificent scene! The utmost heights are harmonized with the uttermost depths! From the heights the Father's voice resounded and announced the glories of His Son, and in the depths the waters surged and overflowed. Before this glorious sight, the church invites the prophet David, the sweet chanter of Israel, to sing the praises of the wedding feast. She asked him to speak about the wedding banquet clearly, because there is no longer any room for symbols.

David recited his psalm (Psalm 77: 16-17) and sang: *"The waters saw You, O God; the waters saw You, they were afraid; the depths also trembled. The clouds poured out water;*

***the skies sent out a sound; Your arrows also flashed about.*** Zechariah the prophet joined David the psalmist and declared the Bridegroom to be 'the East' or 'the Sunrise'. His rays spread in all directions because He is the Sun of Righteousness.

*The Church, the bride of light, marveled at the Royal Bridegroom, because through His washing the height and the depth were reconciled.*

*She saw the river entirely aflame, with its rushing streams trembling and she heard the voice of the Father that proclaimed about His beloved One.*

*She sent for and called that Harp of the Spirit, David, to come to sing the songs that are suitable for the marriage feast.*

*"Come, son of Jesse and bring with you your hymns so that today, on the marriage feast of your Lord and your son, we may rejoice.*

*Make your tones sing out clearly and stretch out the strings of your harp and lay before hymns that would clearly make me rejoice.*

*Do not tell me hintingly when you are singing, make clear your word and let truth resound in your hymn reveal, and explain to me, on what account does the river tremble, and what force compelled the depth and it trembled and became dismayed?*

*What is the voice that, behold, descends from the height to the depth and for what purpose are these continuous lightnings that have inflamed the air?*

*David laid out hymns of praise in response to the Bridegroom so as to explain the matter to the church as it was.*

*"The waters have truly seen you God and they feared:*

*The abysses, too trembled and the clouds of the air sprinkled.*

*The whole nature of the water perceived that you have visited them:*

*Seas, abysses, rivers, springs and pools*

*They thronged each other to be blessed by Your footsteps because your great manifestation that came upon them caused them tremble.*

*You stepped upon Jordan as upon the summit of all seas; and the extremities of the abyss and of the floods trembled at your power.*

*The whole nature of the waters was stirred by your descent, because by your baptism you made everyone worthy of pardon.*

*The waters of seas, although distant are not distant because the power of your-holiness has stirred mystically and visited them.*

*For this reason the waters truly saw you and they feared.*

*Even the abysses trembled because by your descent you have caused them to tremble.*

*Clouds sprinkled water into the river when you were baptized so that they too should not be deprived of your descent.*

*Behold, even the heights of heaven proclaimed again through your heavenly Father, so that in His testimony the earth should perceive that you are the Only Begotten.*

*Your lightnings illuminated the earth and it saw the glorious Light.*

*The earth was troubled by darkness until you came.*

*Waters saw you and they feared you as the Lord.*

*The earth of your energy heated them while you were descending."*

*David explained the cause of the matter when he sang, and Zechariah came; he stimulated the Church to show her: "This is the One whose name, I had told you, is Day-Star.*

*Behold, he has shone forth and the extremities were enlightened by his rays.*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **John stretches his hands upon Christ the Fiery Flame**

The heavenly hosts wondered within themselves: How could this handful of straw be stretched out over the head of consuming Fire?! How could such a hand not burn even though we prostrate before Him in fear and trembling? The hand of clay moves while the heavenly ones glorify Him with all their hosts.

*John came near and stretched out his hand upon the Flame and the ranks of watchers took shelter among one another out of fear.*

*The hosts marveled at the wonder that they saw while the dry-stick took hold of the Coal of Fire, but was not scorched by it.*

*The heavenly beings marveled at the fearful sign that took place there because the fleshly hand was not harmed by the Flame.*

*Seraphs cover their faces before His flame but a hand fashioned out of clay is placed upon His head, a brick molded from the soil laid hold of the Sea, and set its hand upon the Flood but it did not dissolve.*

*It is a marvel, to say: While the fiery beings were powerless before Him, yet He descended beneath the right hand of the son of a barren woman for baptism.*

*Carried by the cherubs, glorious on the chariot, veiled from the watchers,*

*He was hidden from the ranks, glorified among the gatherings, awesome over the legions.*

*The orders remain veiled, the gatherings are perplexed, the ranks tremble;*

*The forces quake, choirs shaken, the thousands shudder;*

*The flame stood aside trembling as He descended to be baptized by the dust that His hands had fashioned.*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **The Father spoke in person and not through His creation**

The Father Himself spoke and not through His creation, the One who has no human tongue nor speaks a human language. The Father was not ashamed to speak of His only Son who took the form of a slave but sang a beautiful melody that was never uttered before, singing of the affection of His fatherhood towards His Beloved Son.



*Heaven was torn open and the Father proclaimed about His Beloved.  
The Spirit shone forth and stood there to bear witness concerning the Only- Begotten.  
The voice proceeded from the inner-chamber of the royal palace so that it might about the Son of the King that He is not a stranger.  
The hidden utterance was set in motion not by the mouth to come out to give witness concerning that offspring of the divinity.  
That Word hidden from all had been revealed when it called out over the Hidden One who had come to the manifestation.  
A loud voice resounded in the sky without a tongue, from the One without a body, over His Beloved who had become embodied.  
He did not speak through an angel at that moment, nor did He announce through the glowing mouth of any of the watchers.  
He did not borrow for himself any word or voice from the heavenly beings, because He spoke from His essence about His Only- Begotten.  
The Father himself truly spoke personally, so as to indicate that His Son was genuine.  
A new word was heard among the gathering, the exalted voice, the like of which was not again spoken,  
A melody that has never been sown in the ears of men,  
A fearful resonance that by itself made its voice heard.  
He did not speak like that word on any other time, because He did not have another son in any other place.  
The Mighty One thundered to express His love for His Son among the crowds.  
To announce to them that He is the true Son.  
The affection of the Fatherhood was greatly stirred towards the Only- Begotten,  
And it (the fatherhood) had uttered to show that He was his Beloved.  
The divinity exalted above all was not ashamed, to see His Son clothed in a body and baptized in the water.  
The Majesty did not diminish when its Beloved One, descended for baptism that was employed for the redemption.  
It was not insufficiency of His that was filled up from the water, so that the Father might renounce and do not acknowledge Him because He was deficient.  
He was perfect before He descended as well as after the descent,  
And the Father had the confidence to acknowledge His Son.*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **The End of the Levitical Priesthood in John, and the Beginning of the New Priesthood in Christ**

Christ did not receive a priesthood in the waters of baptism, for His heavenly priesthood was not extrinsic to Him. Rather, His baptism ended the role of the Levitical

priesthood, and He handed a new priesthood to His disciples so that they might practice priesthood through Him.

*This is the reason that called Him to come for baptism; so that the dominion of the priests should be concluded in Him and it should proceed from Him.*

*The Father gave the deposit to Moses on the mountain and sent His Son who received it from John in the water.*

*It was handed down by the tribe of Levi, and the Lion's Whelp of the house of Judah arose and carried it from him (John)*

*Holiness overflowed upon mount Sinai from the Exalted One, and through John it overflowed upon our Redeemer.*

*From His very beginning our Lord took it upon himself to accomplish His way, so as not to join any other path as an alien one.*

*That priesthood which had been handed down from the house of Aaron proceeded from our Redeemer through the apostles to the world.*

*Not because He was lacking in the great priesthood of the priests*

*Did He receive it at baptism and then gave it:*

*It was so as not to confound the path of truth which His Father has primed.*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **Christ Was Not Glorified by Aaron's Priesthood or David's Kingship**

No priest had ever been king in the Old Testament, because priests had been from the tribe of Levi while kings from the tribe of Judah. Melchizedek, the king of Salem and the priest, had been a symbol of Christ because his father and mother were unknown. The Apostle Paul says: "Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? ... And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest... For He testifies: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: "The Lord has sworn And will not relent, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'" (Hebrews 7: 11-21).

The Levitical priesthood and David's kingship were preparing the way for Christ, the Heavenly Priest and King of Kings. *The two were perfected in Him, not because He was in need but for the sake of humanity, so that humanity might know Him through their symbolism of Him.*

*It is not because the ocean is lacking in fullness that all streams and rivers flow towards it.*

*By nature water hurries to the sea while it [the sea] did not lack.  
But the whole sea is not made to abound more than it already is.  
It is not because He lacked that Christ received the hand (the priesthood of) Aaron  
Nor was it because He lacked (anything) that He received the kingdom from the house of David.  
The kingdom proceeded with the priesthood and rested upon Him,  
While He is the High Priest and the King of kings.  
Holiness overflowed and came and fell upon Him  
As a brooklet into the full ocean which did not lack anything.  
The kingdom came from the house of David and poured out upon Him  
While His kingdom is much richer than the sea.  
He ascended as He descended in a Holy manner, as He is  
And He was received on the wing of the voice from His Begetter.  
The Spirit encircled the baptized Bridegroom with feathers of glory  
And the church became confirmed that it is He and she fell down before Him.  
O Perfect One, who came so that He might perfect the insufficient by the waters;  
Let your great mercy overflow from you upon my insufficiency.  
Blessed is He who came and was baptized by His envoy as it pleased Him.  
He is the one who sanctified baptism; to Him be glory.*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## The Types of Baptisms

In his seventh homily, "On the baptism of the law, the baptism of John, and the baptism that our Lord gave to the apostles" St. Jacob of Serugh speaks about the baptisms in the law that did *not* grant the Holy Spirit to the baptized person. He also confirms that the baptism of Christ is *the one true baptism*, and the baptisms that came before it symbolized it.

- 1. The baptism of the Mosaic law:** Its role is for the believer to discover that his nature is corrupted by sin, and he needs the divine Savior.
- 2. The baptism of John:** it is the revelation that the Savior came to forgive sins and presents Himself to His church as a heavenly Bridegroom, for her, to enjoy a life of victory and eternal glory. During John's ministry, the bride was waiting for the Messiah, and she recognized Him after His baptism, after which Christ entered into battle with the prince of the air in the wilderness, to grant her the right to conquer the forces of darkness in Christ Jesus.
- 3. The baptism that our Lord gave to the apostles:** The Son of God gave His baptism to His apostles, which is the baptism of fire and the Holy Spirit for those who descend in it. It grants power and births spiritual children, who can call the Heavenly Father 'our Father'. This is the baptism that the Son of God opened up to give birth to the Father's new immortal children.

### The Baptism Rituals of the Law

*The law granted baptism to the circumcised, and the Holy Spirit was not given to all of the baptized. The law commanded: He who enters to see the dead must be washed with water and he is unclean all day long.*

*And whoever grasps the bone of the deceased must wash with water, and whoever has a night discharge, also must wash.*

*The law gave baptisms in various forms to draw a pattern for the baptism that gives birth to the firstborn.*

*The Law baptisms were shadows and did not bring those baptized closer to perfection.*

*The largest and greatest of them is the baptism of the Son of God, just as the body is (greater) than the shadow ...*

*The baptisms in the law are a shadow, and John's baptism is the (baptism) of repentance.*

*The baptism of the Son of God gives birth to first-born and children, so that they become brothers of the only One ...*

*Christ came, and with his cross opened baptism, to become the mother of life to the world instead of Eve.*

*Water and blood flowed to the image of spiritual babies, so baptism became the mother of the living.*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **John's baptism paved the way for the bride to be betrothed to the Son of God**

*From one step to the next, He [the Lord Jesus] walked,  
like a merchant of life who distributes it among the dead.  
In the first step He dwelt in Mary  
and was born to visit the world as man  
The second step was baptism:  
and He dwelt in it to clothe warriors with armor.  
John became a voice in the wilderness to prepare the way,  
and opened a door to restore humankind back to God's house ...  
John came to arrange the bride's betrothal to the Son of God  
and to wash away her uncleanness.  
He immersed her into the water, and washed her with repentance to be pure,  
so she could see the Bridegroom, the King.  
He cleansed her in the river and removed her shame  
lest the Bridegroom sees her dirty, for He loves beauty.  
With baptism he made her pure and chaste,  
then he brought her to the bridegroom when she was holy.  
Thus the son of the Levites rushed to the river  
to prepare from the water the bride adorned with beauty ...  
He spoke about the greatness of the King her Lord,  
and unceasingly preached of His heavenliness ...  
Every day he would kindle her heart with love that she may long to Him,  
but the Bridegroom was hidden, and the bride did not recognize Him.  
She learned from John how great and glorified He is, that Christ is hidden,  
and that the whole wilderness is ablaze with the desire to behold Him.<sup>1</sup>*

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Translated by Behnam Sony, Part One (Baghdad, 2003), Homily 7.

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John came to arrange the bride's betrothal to the Son of God and to wash away her uncleanness. He immersed her into the water, and washed her with repentance to be pure, so she could see the Bridegroom, the King. He cleansed her in the river and removed her shame lest the Bridegroom sees her dirty, for He loves beauty. With baptism he made her pure and chaste, then he brought her to the bridegroom when she was holy. Thus the son of the Levites rushed to the river to prepare from the water the bride adorned with beauty ... He spoke about the greatness of the King her Lord, and unceasingly preached of His heavenliness ...

## St. Jacob of Serugh

