

For the Child: The House Blessing (Jane G. Meyer)

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It's early February. The nights are long, but daylight is beginning to lengthen—slowly, steadily. During this part of the year, our parish priests are on the move, and have been, since January, blessing homes from one end of town to the other. And tonight it's our night. I've been cleaning and cleaning and cleaning, for as one friend told me long ago, "Why not have your house physically *and* spiritually cleansed all in one fell swoop?!" I thought her advice sound, so our family takes pains to scrub and scour, and ready both our home and our hearts for our annual house blessing.

There may be a few rituals in the Orthodox Church that we struggle to explain to a young child, but the house blessing is not one of them. Many of the elements that accompany this tradition are appealing to a little one. Here are a few things we've discovered over the years that make this tradition especially meaningful.

Before the Blessing

- Of course, cleaning is not *always* a child's favorite occupation, but being

handed the spray bottle and a cloth to wash a window, or a bucket of warm water and rag for a small portion of the floor is good work and can truly be fun. Depending on the child's age, encourage him to work alongside you for a bit to ready the home.

- The child can also clean and prepare his own altar or prayer table. Encourage him to make his own space as beautiful as possible.
- Typically the family prepares a sprig of evergreens or basil for the priest to use as he blesses the home. Sylvia Leontaritis, the author of *A Pocketful of Seeds*, and blogger at www.orthodoxmom.com suggests planting a pot of Basil on September 14th, the feast day of the Elevation of the Cross. She helps her boys with the planting, but leaves the watering and pruning up to them. When it's time for the house to be blessed in January, they cut and prepare the sprigs, and Sylvia says, "The basil is like their widow's mite." A lovely idea.
- After the feast of Theophany, and until you have your house blessed, sing the hymn of Theophany (*When you, O Lord were baptized in the Jordan, worship of the Trinity was made manifest...*
http://www.antiochian.org/sites/antiochian.org/files/sacred_music/Trop-Theophany%28A%29.pdf) alongside your evening meal prayer. If you do this for several nights running, the children will be able to sing the hymn with confidence come house blessing day.



During the Blessing

- Make sure every child has something to hold as the family processes around the house. A cross, a small icon, a candle—these are all items easy for little hands to hold. Every child should have something to carry—something beautiful, and something that connects them to the celebration.
- Make sure areas where your children spend a lot of time are blessed. If they have a playhouse in the back yard, brave the cold and process outside to bless those spaces that your children love.
- If your children have pets, make sure they aren't missed. Children are especially mindful of making sure *their* loved ones receive a little bit of holy water sprinkled their way, too.

Other Ideas

- Have the priest join you for a small meal or dessert after the blessing. And invite godparents or other friends or family from the neighborhood or church

to participate. Children love parties, and by extending the evening with food and some time to relax together, you create deeper bonds between home and church.

- Join in with other families and have a house blessing that proceeds from house to house. Several folks in our parish have a progressive dinner, and make a whole afternoon and evening event out of the blessing of their homes. By offering a bit of food at each home and traveling by car from house to house, the whole group of children and adults sings and travels through town together. If you choose another family or two with children of the same age, the joy in being together brings a real spirit of excitement to the celebration.

With a little preparation, this is a wonderful occasion for the child to fully enter into the life of the church.

O God our Savior, the True Light, Who was baptized in the Jordan by the Prophet John, and Who did deign to enter under the roof-tree of Zacchaeus, bringing salvation unto him and unto his house: do You, the same Lord, keep safe also from harm those who dwell herein; grant to them Your blessing, purification and bodily health, and all their petitions that are unto salvation and Life everlasting; for blessed are You, as also Your Father Who is from everlasting, and Your All; Holy, Good and Life; creating Spirit, both now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.—

Taken from the Prayer of the Blessing of Homes at Theophany.

http://www.goarch.org/chapel/liturgical_texts/home_bless

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