

## Theophany and the Domestic Church

*The Gospel of Matthew records Jesus as saying "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (18:20). What is the Christian home, the Domestic Church, the smallest unit of the Christian community, if not two or more gathered in the name of Christ? Each family, being part of the Church, is charged with much the same ministry as the parish church, namely worship, Christian fellowship, charity, education in the faith, growth in virtue, evangelism, hospitality and works of mercy.*

Worship in a Ukrainian Catholic home is best centered on a home altar, typically called an "Icon Corner." This is usually located in a prominent place in the living room or dining room of the home. The corner consists of icons, a candle (a hanging candle works nicely), a decorative embroidered cloth towel (*rushnyk*) and devotional items. Some items such as the Holy Bible, prayer books and *chotki* (a small, knotted rope used to pray the "Jesus Prayer") can be placed on a shelf or small table below the icons. It is here that the family comes together for prayer each day and especially on special occasions and holy days. The family faces the icons in the icon corner during prayer.

In January, water is blessed and sanctified on the feast of the Theophany of Our Lord. All who attend services are invited to drink of the newly blessed water for the "purification of their souls and bodies and cure of their weakness." They are then invited to take Holy Water to their homes for continued blessings and protection against evil.

What a wonderful opportunity we have to continue, in our homes, the Church's celebration of the Theophany of Our Lord! When we return home, we can place the Holy Water in the family's icon corner, so that all in the family can see it and use it when special blessings are needed.

In the weeks that follow Theophany, we can have our home blessed by our priest. It is part of his ministry, time and conditions permitting. If possible, ask the priest to come at a time when all family members are present, especially the children. Be sure the TV is turned off and have a small lighted candle for each family member to hold during the blessing.

The priest will pray and sprinkle holy water to bless each member of the family, the icon corner, and each room of the house. He prays to the Holy Spirit, "to keep safe from all harm those who dwell here; grant them your blessing, purification and bodily health, and all their petitions for their salvation and life everlasting." Welcome your priest as he blesses your home and all who dwell in it!

The celebration of Theophany is a wonderful opportunity to build up your Domestic Church!