

BLESSING OF A BONFIRE

on the Vigil of the Birthday of St. John the Baptist
conferred by the clergy outside of church

In the Church's veneration of her saints the cult of John the Baptist had from earliest times and continues to have a most prominent and honored place. John gave testimony of the true light that shines in the darkness, although he proclaimed in utter humility: "He must increase, but I must decrease." And the Master also spoke in highest praise of His precursor: "I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist." Attuned to the words of the Gospel the Christians of former times were filled with love and enthusiasm for this saint, and expressed a justifiable conviviality at the approach of his feastday by lighting a bonfire the night before in front of their churches, in the market-place, on the hilltops, and in the valleys. The custom of St. John bonfires, indicative of a people with unabashed and childlike faith, continues in some places to this day.

P: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All: Who made heaven and earth.

P: The Lord be with you.

All: May He also be with you.

Let us pray.

Lord God, almighty Father, the light that never fails and the source of all light, sanctify ✠ this new fire, and grant that after the darkness of this life we may come unsullied to you who are light eternal; through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

The fire is sprinkled with holy water; after which the clergy and the people sing the following hymn (for the music see the music supplement):

Hymn: Ut queant laxis

O for your spirit, holy John, to chasten
Lips sin-polluted, fettered tongues to loosen;

So by your children might your deeds of wonder
Meetly be chanted.

Lo! a swift herald, from the skies descending,
Bears to your father promise of your greatness;
How he shall name you, what your future story,
Duly revealing.

Scarcely believing message so transcendent,
Him for a season power of speech forsaketh,
Till, at your wondrous birth, again returneth,
Voice to the voiceless.

You, in your mother's womb all darkly cradled,
Knew your great Monarch, biding in His chamber,
Whence the two parents, through their offspring's merits,
Mysteries uttered.

Praise to the Father, to the Son begotten,
And to the Spirit, equal power possessing,
One God whose glory, through the lapse of ages,
Ever resounding.

P: There was a man sent from God.

All: Whose name was John.

Let us pray.

God, who by reason of the birth of blessed John have made this day praiseworthy, give your people the grace of spiritual joy, and keep the hearts of your faithful fixed on the way that leads to everlasting salvation; through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.