

Holy Water

Holy water (ፀብል in Amharic) holds a significant place in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, embodying the belief in its power to exorcise demons and heal illnesses. This sacred water, either consumed or poured onto individuals, is central to the practices and rituals of the faith. Numerous monasteries, recognized for their holy water, become pilgrimage destinations for Ethiopian Christians seeking its purifying and healing properties. Furthermore, holy water plays a crucial role in the Timkat (Epiphany) celebration, where it is blessed by priests to baptize Christians, aiming to purify their souls from sins.

The church posits that holy water has the capability to cure people of demons and various ailments, including internal issues deemed "harmful things inside the stomach." Research indicates a strong preference among Ethiopians for traditional healing methods, like holy water, over biomedical approaches, especially for mental health concerns, with a staggering 98% of initial mental health treatments involving traditional practices.

Holy water sites, often located within monasteries, attract thousands of pilgrims daily. These visitors engage in prayers, consume the water, and use it for bathing, frequently taking some home in bottles or jerrycans. In places like Lalibela, traditional healing methods are widespread, and significant numbers of people have relocated to areas like the Entoto Church and the renowned Tsadkane Mariam Monastery for access to holy water.

During public holidays, particularly Timkat (Epiphany), holy water is ceremonially used. Christians gather around pools of water prepared by priests on Ketera (the eve of Timkat) to receive the blessed water, symbolizing the cleansing of their souls from sin. These ceremonies

are notably observed at Jan Meda Square and in Gondar, where Fasilides Bath is a symbolic representation of the Jordan River, drawing crowds to participate in this spiritually significant event.