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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russians Brave the Ice in Annual Epiphany Swim

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Every year on Jan. 19, the Russian Orthodox Church commemorates the Feast of the Epiphany. It's believed that on this day, Jesus Christ was baptized in the Jordan River and revealed himself as the son of God. It is also the day when thousands of Russians, religious or not, take a dip in the sub-zero waters of nearby rivers and lakes — wearing only their bathing suits. According to tradition, water becomes holy on this day, and those who dunk themselves under three times will cleanse their sins away. Although the Russian Orthodox Church is skeptical toward the religious value of these winter swims, the custom has been growing in popularity since the 1980s. Here are scenes from this year's Epiphany swim:

A man takes a dip in an ice hole during an Epiphany celebration at a cathedral in the town of Kineshma northeast of Ivanovo. The temperature is minus 9 degrees Celsius. **Vladimir Smirnov / TASS**

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