

09 Baptism of the Lord Year C January 13, 2019
Isaiah 40:1-5,9-11 Psalm 104 Titus 2:11-14,3:4-7 Luke 3:15-16,21-22

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord and the close of the Christmas Season. Many people in the early Catholic communities saw the Baptism of Jesus as another *Epiphany* or *manifestation* of the Son of God, confirming His mission and role in life. The Divine, the Holy Spirit and God the Father, reveals or manifests that Jesus is the Son of God.

The Gospel we just heard recalls an important moment in Jesus' public ministry. There is Jesus, God made Man, who certainly did not need a ritual cleansing, submitting to a baptism by His cousin John. Unlike the other baptisms John must have performed that day, the baptism of Jesus is a manifestation of Christ's "acceptance and inauguration of His mission as God's Suffering Servant" (CCC536). The time has arrived for Jesus to leave behind His private life working as a carpenter at Nazareth and begin His public ministry and His mission to proclaim that the kingdom of God is at hand.

Can we imagine standing on the banks of the River Jordan and witnessing the baptism of Jesus? What a sight it must have been! A solemn moment in the history of salvation is recorded with the incredible scene of Christ joining the queue of sinners who flocked to the banks of the River Jordan to be baptized by John at that time.

We may ask ourselves, "Why did Jesus, the Sinless One, submit Himself to John's *baptism of repentance*?" The answer is that by accepting John's baptism, Jesus was committing Himself to the work of taking away the sins of the world. When Jesus steps into the waters of the River Jordan, in essence He is saying to us, "*I am joining you in your brokenness, your rejection, your sinfulness and your public shame.*" By immersing Himself in the waters of the River Jordan, He chose to put Himself on the side of sinners and to assume the burden of our sins.

Jesus came to share our way of life and die so that we might live. Jesus doesn't stand apart or put Himself above us. Rather, He places Himself *among* us. He joins us where we are, so much so that He is accused of being a sinner, and is treated as a sinner Himself.

John is hesitant because through the Holy Spirit, he recognizes Jesus as the Lamb of God, the Anointed One who is without sin. Jesus tells John to baptize Him to fulfill the prophecies. When Jesus emerges from the water, the heavens are a blaze of glory as “the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove.” As if that were not enough, the heavens, once closed by Adam and Eve’s sin, are now opened up and a voice calls out, “This is My Son, the Beloved, with Whom I am well pleased.” And what is Jesus doing? Jesus is praying, a habit that will mark all the decisive moments of His ministry and our salvation.

What Jesus does that day at the River Jordan is meant to serve as a model for His public ministry. Jesus will seek out sinners and go among them. He will welcome them. Jesus will show His love for sinners, for all of us. Jesus shows that we are God’s precious children and that He wants to lead us to His Father’s home. And Jesus shows His love for us by becoming one of us and by remaining with us.

Today, let us not just reflect on the Baptism of Our Lord. Let us reflect on our own Baptism. Let us recall, with great awe and wonder, what happens to us when we are baptized: the cleansing water, the presence of the Holy Trinity, the rejoicing in Heaven, and the strength of the grace that remains with us.

Although the Baptism of Jesus is not the same as the Baptism which we receive, our Baptism is related to His Baptism. Our Baptism marks the beginning of our Catholic lives and the beginning of continuing Jesus’ mission.

Unlike John’s Baptism of repentance, our Baptism is in the Holy Spirit. We recall our own Baptism with consecrated water which cleansed our souls from the state of original sin and that was the beginning of our relationship with God. The seed of the Catholic faith was sown in our Baptism, which means we now belong to God’s family.

Through our Baptism we share in the very life of Jesus Christ, a life of intimacy with the Divine Family of the Trinity. To be baptized means we are given a new name, besides our given name, the name of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Every time we enter our Church and sign ourselves with holy water, we are reminding ourselves of our Baptism, of our new name. To be baptized, then, means to enter into the Paschal mystery of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.

Through our Baptism we were welcomed into the Catholic community, the Catholic Church founded by Christ. Baptism is a sacrament of reception, of initiation into our faith community where there is one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one Church, one God and Father of us all.

We have assumed a role within this community, that of the Body of Christ, as we share in the sacramental life of the Church. In Baptism we do not merely belong in the Church, *we are the Church*. That is a strong statement and a powerful truth. Through Baptism we *are* the Church.

The lighted candle at the end of the Baptism ceremony means we are to show the Light of Christ to others by word and deed wherever we go. Our ears are touched to receive God's Word and our mouths are touched to proclaim His faith. Finally, the family of God rejoices when the priest says, "you have put on Christ, in Him you have been baptized. Alleluia, alleluia."

The truth is, our Baptism is not just over with when the priest pours water over our head and the sacred ceremony is completed. The Sacrament of Baptism is the planting of the seed of our Catholic life which grows and bears fruit as we develop in our relationship with God and our relationships with one another.

In Baptism, Jesus gave us an identity, a mission and a destiny. Each time we come to Mass and each time we pray can be times to embrace that identity, live that mission and take a step closer to that destiny. Our Baptism gave each one of us a mission. We don't have to hunt for our purpose in life. We are called to Jesus' mission for our lives. We are called to do what Jesus did.

Our mission as baptized Catholics is to share in the work and mission that Jesus accepted from His Father. We are to pass on the Good News about Jesus Christ and His teaching that we have received. Through our good works of charity and love of our neighbour, living the Beatitudes and Commandments, and being faithful to our Catholic Church and to our Catholic faith are what complete the mission which Christ gave us in our Baptism. Whatever else comes and goes in our lives, the commission to do the work of Christ will last as long as we do!

The mission that was given to us when we were baptized remains with us throughout our entire lifetime. We are never re-baptized because we are commissioned

in the Sacrament of Baptism to represent Jesus Christ for the rest of our life. God has claimed each one of us as His own, and given each of us the grace to continue Jesus' mission and to overcome evil in the world.

As we continue to celebrate this Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass today, let us be transformed by our partaking of Christ's Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist so we can go forth and fulfill our baptismal mission.