

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord A2026

The baptism of our Lord Jesus in the Jordan River by the hands of John the Baptist is an important moment in his life and the revelation of his full identity as the beloved Son of the Father. It also inaugurates the beginning of his public ministry and the fulfillment of the mission received from the Father.

That is why the first reading of this today recalls the prophecy of Isaiah where the servant of God is anointed with the Holy Spirit to bring justice to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind and to bring out of prisoners those in confinement.

However, there is a problem: the baptism of John was a baptism of repentance. John was calling the people to conversion, to turn away from sin and whatever stood between them and God, and to turn to God. Does it make sense to think that our Lord needed conversion? While we understand that he was like us in all things, still the one difference between him and us was that he was sinless. So why did he let himself be baptized?

In the Gospel, John the Baptist seems uncomfortable at the idea of baptizing our Lord. He protests that Jesus should baptize him rather than the other way around. So, what is going on here? Well, the story of our Lord's baptism tells us something about himself and about ourselves. How?

Well, our Lord takes his place in line with sinners. He identifies with sinful humanity. He is really and truly one of us. He belongs to a people, first of all, his immediate community, the people of Israel, a people whose history has been full of stories about good people and bad people, about saints and sinners, and Jesus wants to let us know that he is one of them. It is for that reason, also, that he asks John to allow the baptism to happen so that all righteousness might be fulfilled. Thus, the purpose of Jesus' baptism is the fulfillment of God's saving plan.

Moreover, the baptism is for our Lord an opportunity the Father uses to reveal his identity to the world. The Gospel says that while he was praying a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my beloved Son. With whom I am well pleased." This voice from heaven is the voice of God the Father; it sends us right back to the first reading we heard today of the prophet Isaiah who tells us about the servant whom God calls "my chosen one with whom I am well pleased."

Our Lord is that servant chosen by God as a covenant of the people and a light to the nations. Whoever welcomes him welcomes the Father; however listens to him listens to the Father; whoever accepts him accepts the Father. In the same way, whoever rejects him rejects the Father.

As it was for our Lord, in our baptism the same thing happens to us. We become part of a family, a people, a community, a church. And we receive an identity, not just the name that is given to us, but besides that, we are called Christians. And both of those facts carry with them a certain responsibility. Our call to be Christians, our initiation in baptism carries with it a consecration, a sacredness before the Lord. We all bear in our very persons the touch of the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that appeared over our Lord in the form of a dove.

With that touch the Spirit gives us a great gift. We are filled with the grace of God and we are made a holy people. Most people think they spend their lives trying to become holy. Little do they understand that they are already holy. All they have to do is accept that gift

from God and live its implications because along with that gift comes the responsibility to be another Christ, to be Christ for one another and for the world we live in.

Our consecration as Christians, our Christian life is not restricted to church. The servant was missioned – as Jesus was – to spend his life doing good for others. And so are we. We, too, are missioned as servants, sent to the neighborhood, to the workplace, to the town or the city. We are called to bring a deep commitment to Christian values to a society that no longer seems to respect those values. This mission is not limited to priests or religious. It springs from baptism and is reinforced in confirmation. It is a call that touches all of us.

We must carry on the mission of Christ because by our baptism we are the Body of Christ. The wonderful thing about that is that we're not alone in the struggle to see that Christ's values somehow prevail, to see to it that the homeless are housed and the hungry are fed and the weak and poor of our society have adequate means to live a decent life.

We would do well to follow the example of our Lord. I am certain that if we do it with generous and loving hearts, for us, too, the heavens would open and we, too, would hear our God say to each and every one of us "You are my son, you are my daughter whom I love very much. With you I am well pleased."

Let me finish this way: by accepting to be baptized by John while he was without sin, our Lord gives us an example of humility and conversion. He wants to tell us that no human being can approach God without making amend of sins and convert. All over his ministry, our Lord will insist again and again on the necessity of conversion and the repentance of sin in order to belong to God's Kingdom. God's kingdom is a gift that is offered to anyone without distinction; the only condition to enter it is to convert and to believe in Jesus.

The whole picture of our Lord's' baptism teaches us something about the nature of God: God is a mystery that is revealed to us bit by bit in human history as a Trinitarian God_ The voice that proclaims at the baptism of our Lord that "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am pleased" is the voice of the Father. The Spirit that descended like a dove and came upon our Lord is the Spirit of the Father. Thus, in our Lord's baptism, God reveals himself more fully than he did with the shepherds or the magi at the birth of Jesus. He reveals his presence as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

In baptism are expressed the love of God for us, the mission of the Son for the salvation of the world and the consecration by the Holy Spirit. It is for that reason that our Lord commended his disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. As we celebrate the baptism of the Lord, let us ask him to turn our hearts to the grace of conversion and embrace him as he reveals to us as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6-7; Acts 10: 34-38; Matthew 3: 13-17



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