

Baptism of Our Lord + 9 Jan 2025 + Isa 40:1-11 + Titus 2:11-14, 3:4-7 + Lk 3:15-22

It might seem a bit strange to conclude the Christmas season with the Baptism of our Lord that we celebrate today. By going from Epiphany to His baptism, we have moved forward about 33 years in the space of a week! So what might be the Church's rationale here? Well, the main reason is simply this: our Lord's Baptism really does inaugurate a new and decisive phase of his earthly life. The many years spent in Nazareth, most of which are hidden from us, have come to an end. The Baptism marks the moment in which He begins moving in a direction that will end up at the Cross. And He knows it.

Now to begin, obviously, Jesus did not need to be baptized. And so we hear in St. Matthew's account (3:13-16) of this event, that when Jesus presents Himself to John for Baptism, he protests: *I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.*

So why did Jesus do it? Well, as He says, it was *to fulfill all righteousness*. There is a twofold meaning to this answer. First of all, Jesus is acting *on behalf of God*. Because He is God, Jesus can fulfill or "complete" the righteousness of God Himself. God is "righteous" because He only does what is right. So Jesus is baptized because as God, He is acting rightly toward us sinners. How so? By *sharing* God's righteousness with us, sinners that we are, through the waters of Baptism. And so Jesus "sanctifies," or "makes holy" the otherwise-ordinary waters of Baptism. His plunge into the Jordan infuses these waters with the power to heal, to forgive, to wash clean, and to begin a new life, a new family.

But let's pause here for a moment and reflect on this plunge. As we know, water has almost a miraculous power to produce and promote life—it is one of the main reasons why this planet is inhabitable! The human body is made up of about 60% water; a person can live only about 3 days without water. But water has incredible destructive power. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami tragically took the lives of 230,000 people within just a few hours!

We see this reality of good and evil at play in the Bible too. Water was present at the very dawn of creation, and yet the waters of the flood soon necessitated a new creation. Israel was saved through the waters of the Red Sea, and the Egyptian slaveholders perished in those same waters. Water is a symbol of both life and death, of destruction and resurrection. In the waters of baptism, we die to the old self of sin so as to rise in Christ.

In Baptism, we are literally immersed into almighty God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! This reality should never cease to amaze us, and to fill us with both holy fear and gratitude. But sadly, I don't think the true reality of Baptism affects us as much as it should. For some, it is a mere ritual, a "rite of passage," and nothing more. But it is so much more! It is the end of an old life and the beginning of a new one (even if the one being baptized is a new-born

baby)! It the first step in giving our lives back to the One who gave us life to begin with. It is renouncing the living death which is sin, and pledging to live for and with God forever.

Even though most of us were Baptized as infants, where our parents and Godparents speak on our behalf, we are given many opportunities to renew this plunge of our own voice. Most especially at Eastertime, when we renew our baptismal promises, we are asked: *Do you renounce sin, so as to live in the freedom of the children of God? We respond: I do! Do you renounce the lure of evil, so that sin may have no mastery over you? I do! Do you renounce Satan, the author and prince of sin? I do!* We should take these words very seriously.

And yet if we are honest, are we not sometimes afraid to give our lives over to the Lord, to be immersed into God? After all, isn't God quite demanding? What if He asks us to do something that we don't want to do? Don't we love to hold on to control (or let's be honest, the *illusion* of control)? Well, this brings us to the 2nd meaning to answer that Jesus gives to John the Baptist; that He is to be baptized *to fulfill all righteousness*. And that is, Jesus always goes before us, blazing a trail, showing us the way, even through the darkness of the unknown! He plunges Himself into the waters of baptism acting also *on behalf of humanity*, in order to make a way for us to *receive* the righteousness of God, which is the way of faith.

Now as is evident in the renewal of baptismal promises, when we say "faith," we certainly mean the articles of the Creed. That is the "objective content" of the faith. But there is also what we might call the "subjective content" of the faith; meaning, how we live or "walk by faith" each day. And to walk that walk, we keep *our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of our faith* (Heb 12:2). As we said, Jesus had to know what was coming. He had to know that consenting to baptism was putting His life on the fast-track to the Cross. And yet He did it anyway, trusting in the goodness of His Father even unto death.

And yet, we must always remember that Baptism is both death *and* resurrection. At the moment Jesus rises from the waters of Baptism, the Father, as if bursting with pride, proclaims through the Spirit the most beautiful words: *You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased*. He says the same over us at our Baptism. He says the same over us each time we walk toward Him, with Him in faith, even when we don't see the other side.

Just a little over 3 years ago, a great priest of our diocese, Fr. David Hudgins, was killed in a tragic auto accident. In the bulletin column that he didn't know would be his very last, he wrote these words, words that can only begin describing what he now sees in truth:

You have been baptized. You participate in the divine life of the Blessed Trinity. Who God Is, flows through your veins. You belong to Christ. You are a new creation, a child of God, a partaker of the divine nature, a co-heir with Jesus. You have been sealed with an indelible character: configuration to Christ. This is your seal of eternal life. If we keep this covenant until the end, remaining faithful to Jesus, we can hope to see God and share in the resurrection and the life of the world to come. Amen.