

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD, JANUARY 10, 2021

THE REVELATION OF JESUS AS THE BELOVED SON OF GOD

Dear brothers and sisters,

The Epiphany of the Lord celebrated last Sunday, has three components: the visit of the Magi, the Baptism of the Lord and the Wedding Feast of Cana. All these events have one thing in common: they reveal the glory of Christ. They show that the Son of the Most High, born of Mary ever Virgin in Bethlehem, is the One who came to save the whole world from their sins.

Today, we shall concentrate on one of the three components of the Epiphany; the Baptism of the Lord. The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord marks the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of Ordinary Time. The Lord's Baptism is the inauguration of his public ministry. The Lord was baptized at the age of thirty. But he did not say that everybody should be baptized at that age. The Lord expressly commanded, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Did he say, "I exclude the children and all those who have not yet made it to thirty?" No.

He did not. As we see in the Second Reading where Peter had all the members of Cornelius' household baptized (Acts 10:48). Typically, households include men, women, and children. The grace of the baptism is unmerited and should not be denied to anybody.

Some versions of the Baptism of the Lord were recorded by all the four gospels (Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:7-11, and Luke 3:15-16, 21-22, John 1:29-33). When the Lord approached John in the River Jordan for his baptism, John objected, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?" Jesus said to him in reply, "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he allowed him" (Matthew 3:13-15). What does 'fulfill all righteousness mean? It is to accomplish God's plan of salvation for us. Each of the three synoptic gospels are in accord. They speak about the extraordinary things that happened after the Lord's baptism. These revelatory, supernatural events are the Heavens being torn open, the Holy Spirit, like a dove, descending upon Jesus and the voice of the Father declaring Jesus his Son, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). This echoes the first reading, "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring justice to the nations" (Isaiah 42:1, cf. Psalms 2:7, 89:27, 110:3).

The Baptism of the Lord brings to light many awe-inspiring things. Jesus re-lived the crossing of the Jordan and the entire Exodus event. He is leading us to the heavenly Promised Land. The Baptism evokes the end of the deluge and a beginning of the new creation. It signifies the end of the man's moral shipwreck: The heaven that was closed by the sin of Adam and Eve was opened by the obedience of the Son of God. The climax of the Lord's Baptism is the revelation of the Blessed Trinity. The voice of the Father was heard, the visible form of the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and the Son was being baptized.

"Through Baptism, Christians are sacramentally assimilated to Jesus, who in his own baptism, anticipates his death and resurrection. The Christian must enter into this mystery of humble self-abasement and repentance, go down into the water with Jesus in order to rise with him, be reborn of water and the Spirit so as to become the Father's beloved son in the Son and "walk in newness of life" (CCC 537).

Baptism by John was a ritual washing symbolizing repentance. The Lord did not need Baptism because he was the sinless One. Why did he submit

Himself to it? He did this in identification with us. Submitting himself to be baptized by John is the summary of His redemptive work. It is his acceptance of the mission to save man. He allowed himself to be baptized in solidarity with us. He let himself be counted among sinners. The Bible says, "He surrendered himself to death, was counted among the transgressors, bore the sins of many, and interceded for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12). St Maximus of Turin noted: "Christ is baptized, not to be made holy by the water, but to make the water holy, and by his cleansing to purify the waters which he touched. For the consecration of Christ involves a more significant consecration of the water. For when the Savior is washed, all water for our baptism is made clean, purified at its source for the dispensing of baptismal grace to the people of future ages" (St Maximus of Turin, O.R., the Mystery of Lord's Baptism, Friday After the Epiphany).

The Baptism our Lord instituted and commanded is different from the Baptism by John. The Baptism that Christ instituted is the immersion into the life of the Blessed Trinity and into the Paschal mystery of Christ. "Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritualis ianua*), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin

and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word."(CCC 1213).

Our Lord's baptism reveals him as the Son of the Father confirming the words spoken by the Archangel Gabriel during the Annunciation. "He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32). This does not make Him less than the Father or the Holy Spirit. It establishes that He came to accomplish the role in which Adam, Eve and Israel failed because of their disobedience. In a three-fold temptation, the devil tried hard to get Jesus to rebel against the Father and reject the plan of salvation. The devil failed woefully. Jesus is the Lord, beloved and the faithful Son of the Father. He is the One who has received the fullness of the holy Spirit and through Him all men will receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

What is the message of it all? The descent of the holy spirit was the beginning of the new creation. "By walking into the river Jordan, Jesus sanctified the waters of baptism for all ages. The Father introduced his Son to us. Brothers and sisters, are we going to fix our gaze on the Son of God and follow him on his

way? Yes, that is the way to fullness of life in the beloved Son of God.