

**PASTOR'S MEANDERINGS**  
**FEAST THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD**

**8 – 9 JANUARY 2022**



**SUNDAY REFLECTION**

Ritual washings were common in first century Palestine. Gentiles who wished to convert to Judaism were given a period of instruction followed by three rites: circumcision (related to the covenant between God and Abraham), baptism (related to Exodus) and sacrifice (related to the giving of the law on Sinai). The baptismal rite, which often took place during the days of Passover, involved the confession of sin, immersion in flowing water and the giving of a new name.

At Qumran, those who wished to join the community were given a three-year period of instruction and preparation after which they confessed their sins and were immersed in water. The rite of immersion was repeated annually so that individuals had the opportunity to reaffirm their commitment.

John the Baptist preached repentance, immersing those who wished to repent in water as a sign that they were dying to an old way of life and embarking on a new way. (The Greek verb *bapto* means to dip or immerse). In approaching John for baptism, it appears that Jesus felt that the time had come for Him to embark on His own ministry and that He wished to show a connection between His ministry and that of John.

The account from St. Luke's Gospel of this inaugural event of Jesus ministry, which we have in today's liturgy, does not deal at all with the actual baptism. Instead it concentrates on John's asserting in his preaching at the Jordan that he himself is not the Messiah but that 'someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am ... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire'. The voice from heaven corroborates John's declaration in its addressing Jesus as 'My Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on You'. This proclamation from on high, which seems to

combine Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, calls Jesus as Son and Servant to undertake the exalted role that is His since His conception (Lk. 1:32-35).

With this formal affirmation from on high, Jesus goes forth from the Jordan to commence His Galilean ministry. He begins that ministry in His home synagogue at Nazareth with the words ‘the spirit of the Lord has been given to Me ...’. Later, He would leave His home province and set His face resolutely towards Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51); but, prior to doing that, He would ascend the Mount of the Transfiguration (Lk. 9:28-36). On that mountain, as happened at the Jordan when He was baptized, the voice of the Father would again come from heaven saying: ‘This is My Son the Chosen One. Listen to Him.’

In both locations – at the place where He was baptized (Lk. 3:21) and on the Mount of the Transfiguration (Lk. 9:28) – the revelations from on high came while Jesus prayed: in St. Luke’s gospel He is frequently portrayed as a man of prayer. He prayed not only at the key moments just mentioned but also for the entire night before He selected the twelve (Lk. 6:12) and in Gethsemane before offering the Supreme Sacrifice (Lk. 22:41). He prayed as He reflected on His mission in the midst of the twelve (Lk. 9:18) and away from them in the Galilean hills (Lk. 5:16). He prayed ‘with open arms on the cross’ for all, including His executioners (Lk. 23:34). His ministry ended as it began with prayer: His final words were the words of a prayer: ‘Father into your hands I commit My spirit’ (Lk. 24:46).

On this feast, which marks the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of the Sundays in Ordinary Time, we are presented with the portrait of the praying Messiah, who came among us as Son and Suffering Servant, but who stayed in constant contact with the Father whose work He came on earth to do. In the prayerful contact that He constantly maintains with His Father, He is an inspirational role model for all His followers.

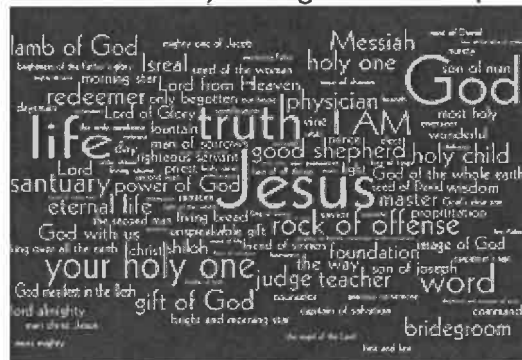
**STEWARDSHIP:** Jesus, whom God called “my beloved Son,” is also the “servant” of whom Isaiah speaks in the first reading. We who are baptized in Christ must follow His example and use our time and resources in the service of God and neighbor.

## READINGS SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

**Is. 62:1-5:** The prophet proclaims that just as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so God rejoices in God’s people.

**1 Cor. 12:4-11:** God has saved us through the cleansing water of rebirth and by renewing us with the Holy Spirit.

**Jn. 2:1-11:** At a wedding at Cana in Galilee, Jesus gives His disciples the first sign of His glory.



## BAPTISM OF JESUS WHY?

This is a question that has puzzled Christians all down through the ages. It even puzzled John the Baptist, who performed the baptism.

Why was Jesus baptized?

### The Problem

We all know what baptism does.

According to the Catechism:

The fruit of Baptism, or baptismal grace, is a rich reality that includes:

forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins,  
birth into the new life by which man becomes an adoptive child of the Father, a  
member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit

By this very fact the person baptized is

incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, and  
made a sharer in the priesthood of Christ [CCC 1279].

So, as you can see, it's quite clear why Jesus would need to be baptized.

Wait a minute! Something is wrong with this argument!

If baptism is necessary for the forgiveness of sins, why did Jesus insist on being baptized by his cousin, John? And if baptism, as St. Peter wrote, “now saves you ... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 3:21), why would the Messiah deem it appropriate, even necessary, to be baptized? What, was the point of the Lord’s baptism in the Jordan River?

These and related questions fascinated and perplexed many of the early Church fathers and theologians. The baptism of Christ, writes Fr. Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B., in his study of the topic, *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan: The Trinitarian and Cosmic Order of Salvation* (The Liturgical Press, 1996), “was widely discussed in all the currents of theological reflection” in the early Church, “without doubt partly because of the problems it posed.” From this discussion emerged many helpful theological insights.

St. Justin Martyr (d. 165), one of the first great apologists, addressed the baptism in his *Dialogue with Trypho*. He emphasized that the Son had no need to be baptized—just as he had no need to be born, to suffer, or die—but did so in order to reveal himself to mankind; the baptism, in other words, was the messianic manifestation, a sign for the Church first, and then the world.

When Jesus came to the waters, St. Justin wrote, “He was deemed a carpenter,” but the proclamation of the Father and the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove showed him to be far more than a mere worker of wood.

In his famous work, *Against Heresies*, St. Irenaeus (d. c. 202) focused on the participation of those who believe in Christ in the anointing of the Savior. The connection between the baptism and anointing—itself an essential Messianic concept—is already evident in the New Testament, as heard in today’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles: “...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.”

This same anointing, St. Irenaeus wrote, is given to those who are baptized into Christ. The Holy Spirit, having descended upon the Son, has become “accustomed in fellowship with Him to

dwell in the human race, to rest with human beings, and to dwell in the workmanship of God, working the will of the Father in them, and renewing them from their old habits into the newness of Christ.”

Others delved into the mystery and meaning of the Jordan River, which was already, at the time of Christ, the site of many key events in the history of Israel. St. Hippolytus (d. c. 236) referred to “the Grand Jordan”; Origen (d. 254) wrote that just as “no one is good, except the one only God, the Father,” likewise “no river is good except the Jordan.” St. Gregory of Nyssa (d. c. 394), in his treatise, *On the Baptism of Jesus*, wrote, “For Jordan alone of rivers, receiving in itself the first-fruits of sanctification and benediction, conveyed in its channel to the whole world, as it were from some fount in the type afforded by itself, the grace of Baptism.”

Just as Joshua had entered the Promised Land by crossing the Jordan, Jesus opened the way to heaven by entering and dividing the same waters.

St. Ephrem (d. 373) wrote a beautiful hymn in which he connected the baptism of Jesus with the womb of Mary and the sacrament of the Eucharist: “See, Fire and Spirit in the womb that bore you! See, Fire and Spirit in the river where you were baptized! Fire and Spirit in our Baptism; in the Bread and the Cup, Fire and Holy Spirit!” Christ, the Light of the World, dwelt first in the womb of the Virgin—who was thus “baptized” by her Son—and then in the womb of the Jordan; he emerged from both as the Incarnate Word, the Savior of mankind. Those who are baptized thus become the children of Mary and partakers of the body, blood, soul, and divinity of her Son.

## PRAYERS

Lord, I believe that You are the Son of the Eternal Father and the Savior of the World. I believe that You have brought about a new era of grace and truth and that I am called to follow You wherever You lead. As we begin this liturgical season of Ordinary Time, may it be a time of extraordinary grace in which I daily heed Your voice. Jesus, I trust in You

Lord, we thank you for deep prayer experiences when we are truly one with Jesus.

They always come to us as your free gift, unexpectedly,  
after a long time of struggle when we felt we were drowning,  
abandoned by all, including you.

After we have been baptized in these waters of loneliness, suddenly

- heaven opens and we feel at one with the universe,  
the sun, the moon and the stars all seem close;

- your Holy Spirit descends on us, his powerful but gentle presence so vivid  
that it is almost in a bodily shape like a dove;

- we hear a voice resonating so deeply within us we know it must come from heaven,

- telling us that we are not aliens in the world but princes and princesses,  
members of your royal family,

- that we are beloved,

- and we must never allow ourselves to feel abandoned  
since your favor rests forever on us.

Thank you, Lord.

## Catholic Prayer: Renewal of Baptismal Promises

*It's very important to remember one's anniversary of baptism. The Church has given an opportunity to gain a plenary indulgence if one renews the baptismal promises on that day.*

*A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful, who renew their baptismal promises according to formula in use; but a plenary indulgence is granted, if this is done either: 1) in the celebration of the Paschal Vigil or 2) on the anniversary of one's baptism.*

**Prayer:**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name), who through the tender mercy of the Eternal Father was privileged to be baptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19, 5) and thus to share in the dignity of his divine Sonship, wish now in the presence of this same loving Father and of his only-begotten Son to renew in all sincerity the promises I solemnly made at the time of my holy Baptism.

I, therefore, now do once again renounce Satan; I renounce all his works; I renounce all his allurements.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born into this world and who suffered and died for my sins and rose again. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

Having been buried with Christ unto death and raised up with him unto a new life, I promise to live no longer for myself or for that world which is the enemy of God but for him who died for me and rose again, serving God, my heavenly Father, faithfully and unto death in the holy Catholic Church.

Taught by our Savior's command and formed by the word of God, I now dare to say:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Prayer Source: *Enchiridion of Indulgences* , June 29, 1968

