

## **Baptism of the Lord - Why did Jesus need to be baptized if he didn't have any sin?**

January 12, 2020

Many moons ago after the **Baptism of the Lord** Sunday mass, a young altar server asked me: “Deacon, **Why did Jesus need to be baptized if he didn't have any sin?**” A very good question. Yes, very good question indeed. For centuries, we understood (or misunderstood) baptism was to wash away our original sin. Many people even put off baptism until moments before their death, believing that with baptism their sins were washed away and they were guaranteed heaven regardless of what kind of life they led. Fortunately, the liturgical renewal of the 1950s onward restored our understanding of baptism as an initiation - a recognition of our status as children of God. Forgiveness of sins is only one part of the grace of baptism; but more, baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as children and makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church. When we consider our baptism, we are reminded of the beautiful verse in Genesis 1: “***So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them.***” Catechism 1213 also says, “**Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life; through baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God.**” Yes, baptism cleanses us from sin, but even more, it has reborn us as sons and daughters of God. It gives us power and grace to accept our own ministry and mission as offered to us.

So Jesus, by being baptized, was showing his solidarity with his community. The Word Incarnate was again showing that God was content to pitch a tent among the people, to live with and be like them. As the gospel tells us, by **being baptized by John, Jesus was fulfilling all righteousness.** (Matthew 3:13-17) After the Baptism, the heavens were opened and John saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and a voice declaring, “***This is my Son with whom I am well pleased.***” Jesus is baptized and anointed with power and the Spirit. For Matthew, this is the point when God presents Jesus's mission and ministry to the world.

Sometimes, we are tempted to compare our baptism with Jesus's baptism. He was anointed with power and the Holy Spirit. He went on to preach, teach, heal, and collect a vast number of followers. He suffered, died, and rose again. He was, after all, both human and divine. And us? Our baptism surely will be less. We aren't divine. We can accept baptism and then go on to live ordinary lives, forgetting perhaps even the day of our baptism. Or can we? Absolutely not. every year at this time the church reminds us about Jesus's baptism. That should be a clue that our own baptism is vitally important. We should remember the day. We should celebrate the fact that we too were baptized with power and the Holy Spirit - the same Spirit that descended on Jesus like a dove. We might not get the visual dramatic effect of the dove and the sky broken open, but we are equally graced, filled with the Spirit, adopted as God's own, and given a life long ministry and mission. It is just that important!

Baptism should be life changing. Imagine what the church might look like if each baptized member grasped hold of and used the power that is freely given us by God in our baptism. In the first reading in Isaiah (42:1-4,6-7) we heard these words of the Lord: “***I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement... those who live in darkness.***” We know these words were used in Isaiah's time for his community, and we now use them to talk about the Messiah, but we must understand that they are meant for us too. Doesn't Jesus constantly tell his followers, and us, that we must take up His ministry and continue spreading the good news? Aren't we supposed to care for the poor, build up the weak, and spread peace? Could we change the world and make it a better place by our presence or have we given up in despair? The lighted candle at the end of the baptism ceremony means we are to show forth Christ by word and deed wherever we go. Let the memory of our baptism ignite the fire that is smouldering in our souls. We often call the people who let that fire burn brightly “**saints**”. Imagine what our church would look like if we, like the saints, let our fire burn and let the light of Christ shine. Remember the words of the beautiful hymn: “**I sing a song of the saints of God ... and I mean to be one, too.**” We are created in the image of God. We are loved beyond measure - all God's people are loved beyond measure. Imagine the church

on fire with the power of the Spirit. Imagine the explosion of peace and joy that could be ours. God says, “**See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.**” (Isaiah 42:9)

**Therefore, let us resolve today to try our best to live always as the children of God in our words and deeds so that we can also hear the loving words from Jesus: “*You are my beloved son (or daughter) with whom I am well pleased!*”**