

## **The Baptism of the Lord**

### **January 10, 2021**

Throughout the Christmas season, we have been reflecting on the child Jesus. We have been meditating on His earthly family - Mary, who gave birth to Him with such faith and love, and Joseph, who accepted Jesus as His own. We've considered that, though He is "King of the Jews", He was poor and homeless with no place to stay except for a stable. Jesus is born weak, a newborn totally dependent upon His parents for everything. He had no strength and no voice. He could not tell the world who He was. Instead, He relied on the angels to announce His birth to the shepherds and the star to lead the Wise Men to the place He was staying. Nonetheless, everyone who saw Him was filled with awe. They knew they were in the presence of someone the world had never seen before.

Today, on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, we see quite another scene. Jesus is no longer a baby but a fully grown man. On the banks of the Jordan River, we are introduced to Jesus' heavenly family. The Holy Spirit descends upon Him in the form of a dove and the Father speaks from Heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." It is no longer Joseph and Mary with the child Jesus, but God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. And it is not a choir of angels or a bright star that announces Him, but God the Father Himself whose voice booms from Heaven. What began in silence and poverty in Bethlehem is now announced with a thunderous show of power. Jesus Christ is being revealed as the One who will save His people and whose saving work brings about the victory of justice which the prophet Isaiah speaks about in today's first reading.

It is also significant that this day's events all take place at the Jordan River.

The Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove over Jesus who is in the water. This reminds us of the dawn of creation when Genesis tells us that the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. The God who created the world is accomplishing a new creation in Jesus. Human beings, corrupted by sin, have wrecked and polluted the world entrusted to them. They have failed to live as one human family on the earth and instead have been torn apart by greed, war, and envy. In Jesus Christ, God intends to make a new creation. St Peter speaks of this in his second letter when he writes, "What we await are a new heaven and a new earth where the justice of God will prevail (2 Pt 3:13). This new creation begins in Jesus in the Spirit who descends upon Him in the waters of the Jordan River.

The Jordan River is also where the Israelites crossed into the Promised Land after spending 40 years in the desert. After being freed from slavery in Egypt, they finally entered into the land they had been promised. They were free. They were safe. Their life as a nation began.

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By appearing in the Jordan River, God reveals to us that He wants to lead us to an even greater land. He wants to lead us to the freedom of Heaven. Heaven is our promised land, it is the desire of every human heart. It is more than a beautiful place. Rather, it is our perfect union with God, where we see Him face to face, where sin and death are destroyed, where every wrong is made right, and where we will live forever in a new creation unspoiled by sin and suffering. After travelling through the desert of this world, Heaven is the Promised Land we hope to cross over into. This is possible because of the saving work of Jesus - most especially, His death and resurrection.

With John the Baptist, the Jordan River also became the place where people confessed their sins and were baptized. By revealing Himself on the Jordan River, God was also proclaiming that He was coming to meet us in our sinfulness. As Jesus said, "I have come to call sinners" (Mark 2:17). Jesus comes not to condemn the world but to reconcile us to God. As He tells Nicodemus in the gospel of St John: "For God did not send the Son to condemn the world but so that it might be saved through Him" (Jn 3:16-17). Yes, Jesus reveals Himself in tremendous power and glory but He doesn't do so to scare us off. Rather, He does so to give us confidence that He has both the power and the desire to save us.

So, we began the Christmas Season in the quiet and darkness of Christmas Eve marveling over our Savior who comes to us as a newborn baby. Now we end this season by marveling in God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - who comes with great power to save us. He meets us in our weakness, lends us His strength, and leads us to the promised land of Heaven. This saving power of God began in each of us with our own baptism and continues throughout our life.

The Lord who revealed Himself with such great power over the Jordan River will reveal Himself to us today in the Eucharist and will enter our hearts to continue His saving work in our souls. Let us give ourselves over to Him, confident in His power to save and work with Him to bring about a new heaven and a new earth.