

## **Baptism of the Lord - B - 1**

Is 42:1-4, 6-7; Acts 10:34-38; Lk 3:15-16, 21-22

The Baptism of John which we hear about today was a symbolic gesture of repentance. It was a way of admitting sins publicly and to receive a symbolic washing with water - an admission that is necessary to truly change for the better. However, Jesus changes Baptism - it still has a symbolic meaning, however, it is not just a symbolic act anymore. Jesus adds the presence of the Holy Spirit to Baptism so that something special and supernatural occurs in Baptism. The scene of Baptism we hear today adds to the Epiphany mystery we began to celebrate last week (telling us about who Jesus is), and it also tells us something very important about ourselves and our relationship to God.

We have just celebrated Christmas and the amazing way that God comes down to become one of us. And while God could have come as a big flash of lightning, or a powerful commander with an army of angels behind - God comes in a unique way. We understand that it is a special act of love and identification with us as God joins with humans so completely and prepares a body to be sacrificed for us. It is a much better way to express love, affection, closeness, and self-sacrifice than coming as a military commander. God never does anything without a reason. So you could ask: why does Jesus go to get baptized anyway? He has no sin to repent from, so there has to be another reason. Actually He does it for us. His humbling Himself in this way tells us about himself, it tells us about what he is going to do, and it changes Baptism from a symbolic gesture to a powerful sacrament that carries the power of God.

So what does it tell us about Jesus? The Baptism continues to expand what was revealed about Jesus when the Magi came to Bethlehem. They were guided by a star showing us that God will guide all to Him who truly search - all may approach Jesus - even us. We see this truth echoed in the second reading: *In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, ... whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.* The Magi's gifts tell us about who Jesus is. Gold for the great King, Frankincense because He is God, and Myrrh (a burial ointment) to point to his death by which we will be saved. The Baptism of Jesus adds to this. The presence of the voice of the Father, the presence of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit coming down in the form of a dove is the first time we see all three persons of the Trinity together - proclaiming that although God is one, God is also Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The voice from Heaven proclaims Jesus as the

Son, and it links him into the prophecy we heard in the first reading: *Here is ... my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations, not crying out, not shouting, not making his voice heard in the street ... he establishes justice on the earth.* Jesus is the one the prophecy speaks about. He came in a quiet way as a baby and he will not be a loud shouter as an adult. We will be more at peace ourselves when we recognize this and not expect Jesus to come and throw His weight around - but be open to Him moving by slow, peaceful and quiet ways in our life.

The Baptism also uses symbols to tell us about what Jesus will do. Like the Myrrh that was given to Him by the Magi, the immersion in water symbolizes death and his rising back out symbolizes his resurrection. Water is a powerful Biblical symbol of both death and life. Since he has no sin himself he takes on all the sins of the world and plunges them to death in the water. Right after he rises out of the water the Spirit comes down on him. This shows what happens to each of us at our Baptism as we are joined to Jesus, he takes away our sins, and the Spirit comes upon us. He does all this not only to show who he is, but also by doing it he makes all the water of the world able to be used in a new way - a way that will impart the Spirit truly and actually in the Baptized.

Finally, Jesus does it to be an example for us. He leads us to undergo Baptism to be transformed by its power. He gives an example to not be afraid to come with him, to not worry about death - because in him it only leads to another life. He shows us that he is walking with us, that he is willing to take our sin upon Himself and die for us. The power of that example should inspire us. John says of Jesus: *One mightier than I is coming after me ...he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.* We underestimate the power of Jesus because we expect Him to act quickly in the present to change events in life according to our own narrow vision. Jesus is playing a long game looking to slowly transform us and to prepare for another life. He opens up a way to be made new by His mighty power, and he brings peace and justice to those who follow Him. If we can learn to follow him, if we can trust in his gentle power and wisdom, then we can truly be one with him in his Body and one day hear the voice of the Father say about us: *You are my beloved [child]; with you I am well pleased.*