

*Baptism of the Lord 2021*  
*St. Patrick – Milford, NH*

The Star of Bethlehem invited us (along with the 3 Magi) to see what God is doing in our world. Today, in the Baptism of the Lord, the vision of what God is doing begins to unfold.

I have always asked myself: why would Jesus, the Messiah ... and clearly superior to John the Baptist ... submit to the authority of John and be baptized at all? To answer that question, we need to look at 2 truths in the great mystery of our salvation, ONE is the truth that God became a human being in the birth of Jesus ... and THE OTHER is the real truth of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection.

In His birth, God's Son becomes one with us. In His baptism by John the Baptist ... God the Son becomes one with us by taking on humanity's sinful state ... in our state of alienation from God the Father. God the Son (Jesus Christ) becomes immersed in our tainted human nature. The word "baptism" means immersion. Jesus is being totally immersed in our human alienated condition. This allows Him to meet us and allows us, in turn, to meet Him where we are at ... the good and the bad together.

In addition to Christ's birth, there is another piece we should examine in order to see what Christ's baptism was all about. And so, we must go ahead to Holy Week .... and Christ's redemptive suffering and death. As He neared Good Friday, Jesus told His disciples: "There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!" Jesus was totally immersed into our humanity, a humanity subject to death. When He died, His side was pierced with a soldier's lance and water flowed out of the gash. At the same moment, the veil in Jerusalem's Temple was torn in two. Both of those events are contained in Christ's baptism by John in the River Jordan. The water flowing from Christ's pierced side made holy the waters of our own baptism.

The tearing open of heaven at Christ's baptism signifies that the barrier between God has been torn away. ... and man can now find his way to God in the baptized and Spirit-filled risen Lord and His Church.

All of this is not of our doing ... all of this did not come about from our human efforts. No, it came from God and comes to us win our own baptism. We cannot justify ourselves; only God can justify us. We cannot make ourselves whole; only God can make us whole. We cannot sanctify ourselves; only God can sanctify us. We cannot make ourselves holy; only God can make us holy. As gifted and powerful we think we are, we are helpless in our weakened human condition, fatally wounded as we are because of sin.

Baptism, you see, is not simply a pretty ceremony, something we do simply because it is a family tradition. Baptism is a summons, something more than a simple invitation. Baptism is an initiation into a way of living, an initiation into living life in the life of Christ.

Finally, we should take a look at one more significant truth. When a person is baptized, WE ARE MARKED ... a character has branded our souls to mark us forever as one of God's sons or daughters. When Jesus was baptized, a voice came from heaven saying: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Likewise, in our own baptism the Holy Spirit descends upon us, too, and we become one of God's own beloved, someone who is CHOSEN, CALLED and IS PLEASING TO GOD.

Today, we remember that our baptism wasn't just a pretty ceremony that was perhaps a part of our family's tradition. We don't bring our newborn children to church and have them baptized simply to please our parents and our honor family or friends as grandparents. Baptism is an initiation ... an inauguration into a life in which we try to live day by day ... in every year given to us in our lives ... with God and with a church community in the way Jesus Christ lived, and continues to live, with and for others.