

## The Baptism of the Lord- C 2013

[Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Acts 10:34-38; Luke 3:15-16, 21-22](#)

Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/011313.cfm>

... after Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him<sup>[SEP]</sup> in bodily form like a dove. <sup>[SEP]</sup>And a voice came from heaven,<sup>[SEP]</sup> "You are my beloved Son,<sup>[SEP]</sup> with you I am well pleased."

With that, Jesus' public ministry commenced. He was next headed to the desert for 40 days to be confronted by the devil's temptations.

Although described in only a few sentences, there is something profound going on at the Baptism of our Lord. God is revealing something about himself as the Father, as the Holy Spirit and as the Son. There is something revealed here about the Trinitarian nature of God.

But there are some hurdles we have to negotiate before we are free to contemplate the mystery of the Trinity.

Ritual immersions in water were not uncommon in first century Palestine. It marked repentance of one's sinful past and a reorientation towards God. One submitted to one's spiritual leader to be immersed in the cleansing waters.

In our Christian baptisms we talk about the washing away of original sin.

But Jesus was without sin. John said that he was not "*worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals*". The evangelist Matthew additionally recorded that at first John protested baptizing Jesus saying, "*I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?*" (Mt 3:13).

So if Jesus is without sin, what is going on in his baptism?

If John had some difficulties with this, one can imagine the discussions among scholars about this quandary. <sup>i</sup>

One possible understanding is that Jesus underwent baptism as an act of solidarity with his fellow Jews who were flocking to John. Jesus may have wished to encourage them in their repentance.

A second possible understanding is that Jesus was bridging the religious fervor of John's time into his own ministry.

A third possibility is that these actions fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah.

*Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit. (Is 42: 1)*

With all of this conjecture, we search Scripture and the teaching of the Church. Our Catechism says:

*Our Lord voluntarily submitted himself to the baptism of St. John, intended for sinners, in order to “fulfill all righteousness.” (Mt 3:15). Jesus’ gesture is a manifestation of his self-emptying. (Phil 2:7)*

*The Spirit who had hovered over the waters of the first creation descended then on the Christ as a prelude of the new creation, and the Father revealed Jesus as his “beloved Son”. (CCC 1224)*

St. Paul tells us in Romans:

*Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. (Rm 6:3)*

While we are indeed cleansed of our sins when we follow Jesus’ example and immerse ourselves into baptism by the Holy Spirit, we more profoundly enter into Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. We enter into his paschal mystery, the same mystery we embrace when we come to this altar to receive Him in the Blessed Sacrament.

We are a new creation. But how is this to be expressed?

Peter preached to the household of Cornelius:

*With that baptism, “God anointed Jesus ...with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.” (Acts 10:38)*

As we die and rise with Christ through his baptism, we are called to act as he acts: do good... heal the oppressed... allow God to be with you.

I heard a story this week that helped bring this home to me.

Deacon joe schmitt is a dear friend of mine, more brother than friend. He was working downtown at Ministry with Community serving lunch to the homeless. Now Dcn. joe has the unusual habit of wearing sandals. What is unusual is that in Michigan, he wears them year-round. I won’t go into his reasons for him doing so, but certainly one wearing sandals in January would catch one’s eye.

Well, there Dcn. joe was delivering plates of food to the tables when one of the homeless being served caught sight of Dcn. joe's bare toes. The man approached him and said, "I've got something for you," upon which he reached into his plastic grocery bag that contained his belongings and pulled out a pair of socks. It may have been his own last pair.

Dcn. joe told him that he chose to go without socks, but the man thought Dcn. joe was just acting humbly. It took another volunteer to convince the man that really, that's just genuinely joe.

The man continued on, probably a bit puzzled. Dcn. joe continued on... with tears in his eyes. Here Dcn. joe was trying to be the hands of Christ in service to those in need and suddenly he was confronted with the Christ-like actions of one who possessed next-to-nothing, but possessed the greatest treasure of all, a heart like Jesus', a totally giving heart.

I'm humbled just listening to the story. I'm inspired by this recent manifestation of Christ "doing good and healing the oppressed". I'm not only inspired by this unknown man, but his actions dare me to act the same.

Bishop Bradley in his pastoral letter to us, *We Dare to Say*, says:  
*The mission of our entire lives is to live, act, and love like Jesus.*

He goes on to say that:  
*It is in and through the Church that we are motivated to do works of charity to help those in need, and works of justice for the weak, oppressed, and marginalized as well as those victimized by the powerful forces of society.*

It was through baptism, that Jesus was anointed and began his ministry. It is through our own baptism that we are united to Jesus' mission.

May we come hungry to Jesus' altar, to receive and to be nourished, so that we may dare to love like Jesus loves.

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<sup>i</sup> Joseph Pollard, *Fresh Light*, p. 28