

BAPTISM OF THE LORD; Cycle – C; Jan. 12th 2025
Isaiah 40; 1-5, 9-11; Titus 2: 11-14, 3:4-7; Luke 3: 15-16, 21-22

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Starting from the day of Christmas we celebrate a series of Jesus' manifestations. But Epiphany is known as the major manifestation of Jesus. The birth of Jesus itself is the manifestation of God to the world in the physical form. We also see the manifestation of Jesus to the shepherds. Finally at the Baptism Jesus reveals himself to the whole world, both the Jews and the Gentiles. In a way we can say that even every miracle of Jesus was the manifestation of his divinity. We notice that regularly the Baptism of the Lord doesn't fall on a Sunday. The rule is that if Epiphany is observed on a Sunday on January 6 or before, the Baptism of Christ is observed on the following Sunday. If the Epiphany is observed on January 7 or 8, the Baptism of Christ is observed on the following Monday, on January 8 or 9.

Neither John the Baptist nor Jesus invented the rite of baptism. It had been practiced for centuries among the Jews as a ritual equivalent to our Confession. Until the fall of the Temple in 70 A.D., it was common for Jewish people to use a special pool called a **MIKVEH -- literally means "collection of water"** – as a means of spiritual cleansing, to remove spiritual impurity and sins. Men took this bath weekly on the eve of the Sabbath; women, only monthly. Converts were also expected to take this bath before entering Judaism. The orthodox Jews still retain the rite.

John the Baptist adopted the Jewish rite of purification and named it as the baptism of the repentance of sins. And also the baptism administered by John the Baptist was a public commitment people made to live holy lives and prepare for the coming of God's kingdom. In fact, Jesus didn't need a baptism of repentance for sins, as he was the Son of God. But he received the baptism from John, first of all, to identify himself with the ordinary people who were burdened by their sins. Secondly, through his baptism Jesus made a commitment to the Father that in everything he would seek the will of the Father to build the Kingdom of God. And also the Baptism of Jesus marks the inauguration of his public ministry.

Catholic Church teaches that all the seven Sacraments are instituted by Jesus Christ. In other words, directly or indirectly the Sacraments are connected with the life and teachings of Jesus. First of all, Sacrament of Baptism has its origin from the Baptism of Jesus. Secondly, in John's gospel chapter 3:5 Jesus says to Nicodemus, *"Amen, amen I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit."* Thirdly, the last commandment of Jesus to the Apostles in Matthew 28: 19 was,

“Go therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

Of course, when we compare our baptism with that of Jesus, we see differences as well as similarities. First of all, Jesus didn't have original sin as well as any sin. So his baptism was not a purification or sign of repentance for sins. Whereas, by our baptism we are purified of our original sin and in case of adult baptism all the sins. And also Jesus' baptism was a public declaration of his identity as the Messiah. But in our case it is the sign of our commitment to Jesus. At the baptism of Jesus the Heavenly Father declared Jesus to be His beloved Son. In our baptism too the Heavenly Father chose us to be His beloved sons and daughters.

The baptism in our life has got threefold purpose. First of all, it was our initiation to the mystical body of Christ and by which we became the member of the Community or Church. And also our baptism makes us eligible to receive other Sacraments in the Church. Baptism is the starting point of our pilgrimage with Christ. It began at the river of Jordan and finally after a long exodus it takes us to the mount Calvary where we die with Jesus and rise with Him. St. Paul speaks about the significance of baptism in **Romans chapter 6:3 “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.”**

Secondly, our baptism is an open invitation to us to become the disciple of Jesus. Once we are his disciples we are his close friends as well. At the same time we share the responsibility of a disciple of Christ. In our third purpose of baptism we are commissioned by Jesus to proclaim the Good News to the whole world. Every disciple is bound to share the Christ experience with others who may not have achieved the same. Once we fulfill this third mission of proclaiming the gospel our baptism becomes meaningful and the mission is accomplished and we become the disciple in full sense.