

## From The Pastor

Baptism is our initiation into the life God, and the life of the Church. More than an identity with a church community there is an essential character of baptism that is our very entrance into Christ himself. Baptism is a consecration, a deep uniting of ourselves into the person and the life of God through Christ Jesus. More than a ritual expression of the Church and its life, baptism puts us in direct relationship with Jesus and his baptism, now effective in us through the Holy Spirit.

Similar too, but different than the feast of the Epiphany, the feast of the Lord's baptism is both theological and personal. The baptism of Jesus continues His revelation as the divine One sent by God for the salvation of all. No longer an infant in the manger, now the adult Jesus has a personal experience of the Father, and the empowerment and identity of the Holy Spirit. Again, the divinity of Jesus is expressed, but it is a personal experience for Jesus who is confirmed in his identity and sent forth on his mission.

Further theological expression in the experience anticipates all that will take place in the life and mission of Jesus. This baptism is an all inclusive life experience. Jesus' entrance into the waters of the Jordan signifies his anticipation of the baptism of pain he will endure on the Cross. Jesus does not need baptism for the forgiveness of his sins. Jesus accepts baptism on our behalf for the forgiveness of our sins. He who knew no sin takes on our sin so that we may know and share in the righteousness of God (2Cor.5:21). Rising from the waters of the river symbolizes the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. In his death and Resurrection, we are freed from the death of sin and invited into the promise of eternal life. Finally, the presence of the dove revealing the love of the Holy Spirit, anticipates the grace and transformation of the feast of Pentecost.

This can all sound pretty heady, I know, but it is a wonderful and powerful expression of what the baptism of the Lord is all about. It further expresses the significance of what this baptism means for all of us. What Jesus has received from the Father, we receive from Jesus. In Luke's gospel, from which we read today, the words from heaven are directed personally to Jesus. This is a personal experience for Jesus who is confirmed in his human\divine nature to now go forth to fulfill his mission. However, if the words are for Jesus, they are clearly for us as well. The consecration of Jesus to the Father in the Holy Spirit is only for the purpose of drawing us into the circle of the divine life. This is why our baptism is such an essential sacrament. It is not only our entrance into the life of a church community, it is also our entrance into the life of God.

Baptism is only a beginning. It is our entrance into God, but one that should not leave us on the front porch for a quick hello. Our entrance into Christ at baptism is the gift and invitation to continue to know and love Jesus at every turn of our life. For this, again Jesus has shown the way. Jesus needed his baptism in the sense that he needed the confirmation and affirmation of the Father's love, in the power of the Spirit to accomplish all that was asked of him. The Cross was not a walk in the park, and could not have been endured without the confirming love of the Father. We too will have crisis in our lives when we will need to know unwaveringly that we are loved.

The baptism of Jesus in the Jordan comes to its fullest purpose in his baptism on the Cross. Recall the words Jesus spoke to James and John when they asked to sit on his right and left in the Kingdom. Jesus asked them, "Can you drink the cup that I will drink, and be baptized into the same bath of pain as I?" Jesus is referring to the Cross, and its suffering. Jesus also shares in another context, 'I have come to bring fire upon the world, and how I wish it were ablaze'. In this context, Jesus is expressing his passionate desire to save the world and have the world know its Savior. This is the third baptism of Jesus; that we should all be baptized into the power and love of the Holy Spirit. This is the purpose and the reason for the whole mystery. The baptism of Jesus is our baptism into the life of God through the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus now present and active in the world today through the Holy Spirit.

The baptism of John is with water that symbolizes a willingness to repent and seek the ways of God. The baptism of Jesus is a baptism of fire and the Holy Spirit; that is to say it is a baptism into the life and power of the divine. This is the revelation of this feast for Jesus and for us.

What remains now is our realization of the gift we have received. One response is that of praise and gratitude, thanksgiving and adoration for God's initiative on our behalf. Another response is our active and ongoing effort and desire to grow in the grace of the Holy Spirit, allowing our lives to be transformed by love. Baptism is a great gift and a great responsibility. It is a baptism of fire that demands the decision of faith that marks a life of love and the suffering love will often demand. It is also the promise of eternal life through the forgiveness of our sins and our reconciliation to the Father who loves us. In that, you have full rights to take the words of Jesus as your own: 'you are my beloved one; with you I am well pleased'.