

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, Jan. 9-10, 2021, The Last Day of Christmas

Today we gather to celebrate the last day of Christmas – the Baptism of the Lord! At the Jordan River, John the Baptist makes clear beyond any doubt his role is only that of precursor to the Messiah. John proclaims: “One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Then, Jesus comes to be baptized by John in the Jordan. Symbolically John is passing the baton on to Jesus. At his Baptism, as Jesus comes up out of the waters, the Father makes clear the mission and identity of this Jesus: “You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased.” With his Baptism Jesus is revealed to be drenched in the Holy Spirit. Mark tells us: “The Spirit, like a dove, descended upon him.”

As we close out the Christmas season, the celebration of Jesus’ Baptism invites us to reflect on our own Baptisms. How many of us even remember the date of our own Baptism? I must say even I must look up the date of my Baptism. Most of us remember our birthdays, and most of us celebrate our birthdays year after year, though as we get older, I will grant many of us would like to forget! Unless we received Baptism as an older child, adolescent, or adult, few of us recall the wondrous events of that day when through water and the Holy Spirit we were incorporated into the life of Christ and the Church.

In Baptism, Jesus poured out his Holy Spirit upon us. Ever wonder why Jesus sought out Baptism from the Baptist? After all he had no personal sins to repent from! First of all, Jesus wanted to show that He accepted the mission He received from the Father – to identify in solidarity with his sinful brothers and sisters, and not only to identify with us, but literally to take our sinfulness upon himself – as the representative of the whole human race – as St. Paul says in Chapter 5 of the 2nd Corinthians – “for our sake God made him to be sin who did not know sin.”

Jesus had himself baptized also, as a model for all those who would become his disciples and make up the Church. Jesus challenges each of us to die to our sinful selves. Then he can pour out His Holy Spirit upon us. As we died to our sinful selves in Baptism, and come up out of those waters, what the voice from heaven said to Jesus at his Baptism – that voice also said to each one of us: “You are my beloved son (daughter), with you I am well pleased.” The Holy Spirit honored each one of us, filling us with the Spirit’s grace and power. We became holy places where the Spirit of God came to dwell and to remain. Our mission is Jesus’ Mission. With the Baptism of the Lord, we come to the fullness of the Christmas miracle: The Word became Flesh and continues to become flesh in the world through us the Baptized. It is our mission to accept the Epiphany challenge to be truly those lamps, through which the Light of Christ continues to shine, brightly in a darkened weary world.

The great scripture scholar (now deceased), Raymond E. Brown, was fond of saying that the day a person is baptized is more important than the day when a person is ordained priest or bishop. And I would add also the day we received First Communion, or even received the sacrament of marriage. And so it is!