

Baptism of Our Lord – B

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord. This brings to an end the season of Christmas. Last Sunday we celebrated the Feast of Epiphany—the manifestation of Jesus to the Gentile world through the wise men. Today, the Church recalls Our Lord’s second manifestation, which occurred on the occasion of His baptism in the Jordan, when a voice is heard from heaven proclaiming Him to be the Son of God. Jesus descended into the River to sanctify its waters and to give them the power to make us children of God. The Baptism of Jesus is an important event where we see the entire Trinity. It takes the importance of a second creation where we are made anew.

In the Eastern Church, this feast is called Theophany because, at the Baptism of Christ, God appeared in three persons. The baptism of John was a preparation for the Baptism of Christ—baptism by water and the Holy Spirit. It moved people from repentance to confession and forgiveness of their sins. Christ did not need the baptism because he was sinless. Moreover, Jesus is the author of baptism. Yet, he humbled himself to receive baptism from John the Baptist to identify Himself fully with us. His Baptism also shows support for the ministry of John. By His baptism in the Jordan, Christ manifests His humility and dedicates Himself to the redemption of humanity. His baptism had a symbolic meaning. He carried on Himself our sins. He took upon Himself the sins of the whole world and went into the Jordan to wash it clean. It was symbolic at his baptism but real on the cross. At the Baptism of Jesus a voice is heard from heaven saying, “You are my beloved son.” At the death of Jesus the Centurion says, “Truly this is the son of God.”

Today there are those who say that they do not need the Church or baptism. There are others who want their children to choose baptism for themselves after they grow up. If Christ humbled himself to receive baptism from John the Baptist and established the Church for our salvation, who are we to say that we do not need His Church and baptism? Who are we to deny baptism for our children? By denying or delaying baptism for our children, we are denying or delaying the grace of God for our children and giving the devil the opportunity to steal their souls.

Many of the incidents that accompanied Christ's Baptism are symbolic of what happened at our Baptism. At Christ’s Baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him; at our Baptism the Trinity took its abode in our soul. At His Baptism, Christ was proclaimed the “Beloved Son” of the Father; at our Baptism, we become the adopted children of God. At Christ’s Baptism, the heavens were opened; at our Baptism, heaven was opened to us. After His baptism Jesus prayed; after our Baptism we must pray to avoid sin.

We celebrate birthdays with a lot of fuss. We celebrate many other events, but never our baptisms. How strange that Christians pay so little attention to their real birthday. The 13th Century King of France, St. Louis IX, insisted that the grand celebration of his birthday should be held on the day of his baptism, and not on the day he was born. His argument was that baptism is the beginning of a life that would continue for eternity in the everlasting glory of heaven.

When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, he was answering God’s call. He had said, “Yes,” to God and “Yes” to the mission for which He was sent into this world. When we are baptized, we are saying “Yes” to God’s call to be His children—His call to life eternal. We are also entrusted with a mission—a mission to bring the Gospel to people around us. We are sent into the world to bring joy, hope and love.

Let us not forget that we are children of God. There is a story of a tiger cub raised by goats. It learned to bleat and nibble grass and think like a goat. One night a tiger attacked the goats and all of them fled except the tiger cub. It kept bleating and nibbling. The tiger roared: “What are you doing living with these cowardly goats?” He grabbed the cub by the scruff, dragged him to a pond and

said: “See our two faces reflected? Now you know who you are and whose you are.” The tiger took the cub home, taught him to eat meat, roar and act like a tiger. Let us know who we are and whose we are. Sometimes we get so used to the secular culture around us and forget who we are and who we belong to. We tend to think and act like the world.

Today is a perfect time to renew our baptismal promises and remind ourselves of our identity as sons and daughters of God. Let us promise to be faithful to our baptismal promises, and promote the Gospel of Christ.