



BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. This marks the end of the liturgical season of Christmas on the Church calendar. Tomorrow we return to Ordinary Time until we reach Ash Wednesday, which is March 2nd this year.

When we are born into the world we become members of the human family. When we are baptized we are born into the Christian family. This is cause for great celebration!

As part of the baptismal rite we are anointed with the oil called *chrism*. This word is derived from the Greek and it means anointed one or chosen one. This is the same meaning as the title Christ. (*Don't be confused in thinking that Christ is Jesus' last name. He should more appropriately be referred to as Jesus, the Christ.*)

In baptism "we put on Christ." In baptism the priest or deacon anoints us as "priest, prophet and king." This may sound a little strange so let me explain. We are made priests in the sense that priests honor and give glory to God. They should be models of faith for others. And so we should do the same. We are prophets in the sense that a prophet spreads the Good News. So we, too, by our baptism are called to spread the Good News of salvation "always and everywhere." There is a quote attributed to St. Francis of Assisi that puts this mission in perspective: "Spread the Gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words." In other words, like Christ, we are called to live and model our faith. Finally, we are made kings at baptism. What kind of king was our Lord? Certainly not one that modeled power and might! Instead He modeled compassion and forgiveness and love for all. And so we are called to do the same.

Through Baptism we are reborn. We are born into new life in Christ. We die to an old way of living - original sin - and are reborn as one in Christ. When baptism is performed by full immersion, the dying and rising element of the sacrament is more clearly articulated.

Baptism is the first of the three sacraments of initiation. The other two are Eucharist and Confirmation. These make us full members of the Church. At Baptism our godparents speak on our behalf. In Confirmation, we can look at it as an extension of baptism, because we speak on our own behalf in professing our faith.

Baptism offers us a myriad of graces. It is up to us to tap into them and put them to work. The seeds of faith are planted in baptism. When we are young our parents, godparents, and indeed the entire Christian community must nurture our faith and help it grow. After that it is up to each of us to live up to the mission and the call of our baptism. We must model our faith for others just as Jesus was a model for us.

And I'll close with a few citations from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word.—#1213

"Go therefore and 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" (Mt 28:19-20).—#1276

Baptism is birth into the new life in Christ. In accordance with the Lord's will, it is necessary for salvation, as is the Church herself, which we enter by Baptism.—#1277

The fruit of Baptism, or baptismal grace, is a rich reality that includes forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins, birth into the new life by which man becomes an adoptive son of the Father, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit. By this very fact the person baptized is incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, and made a sharer in the priesthood of Christ.—#1279

Baptism imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual sign, the character, which consecrates the baptized person for Christian worship. Because of the character Baptism cannot be repeated.—#1280

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