

**BAPTISM OF THE LORD: (Is 40:1-5, 9-11; TITUS 2:11-14, 3:4-7; LUKE 3:15-16, 21-22)**

The liturgical season of Christmas comes to a conclusion this Sunday with the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord. The Baptism of the Lord is one of the greatest events in the life of Jesus and is described by all four gospels, and it marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

The Baptism of Jesus was a turning point in the life of Jesus. First, it was a moment of decision. It marked the end of Jesus' private life, which prepared him for his public ministry. Second, it was a moment of identification with his people. Third, it was a moment of approval. Jesus might have been waiting for a signal of approval from his heavenly Father and during his baptism Jesus got this approval of himself as the Father's "beloved Son." Fourth, it was a moment of conviction. At baptism Jesus received certainties (assurances) from heaven about his identity and the nature of his mission: a) He was the "Chosen One" and the "beloved Son of God." b) His mission of saving mankind would be fulfilled not by conquering the Romans, but by becoming the "suffering servant" of God i.e., by the cross. Fifth, it was a moment of equipment. By descending on Jesus in the form of a dove (symbol of gentleness), the Holy Spirit equipped Jesus with the power of preaching and healing.

Jesus' baptism reminds you and me of our mission: a) to experience the presence of God within us, to acknowledge our own dignity as God's children, and to appreciate the divine presence in others by honoring them, loving them and serving them in all humility; b) to live as the children of God in thought, word and action. c) to grow daily in intimacy with God by personal and family prayers, by participating in the Holy Mass. It is a day to thank God for the graces we received in baptism and let us renew our baptismal vows on this feast of Baptism of our Lord.

**A couple of questions:** 1) Why did Jesus, the Son of God, receive the 'baptism of repentance' meant for sinners? 2) Why did Jesus wait for thirty years to begin his public ministry? The strange answer for the first question given by the apocryphal book, "The Gospel According to the Hebrews," is that Jesus received the baptism of John to please his mother and relatives. In this humble submission we see a foreshadowing of the "baptism" of his bloody death upon the cross. Jesus' baptism by John was the acceptance and the beginning of his mission as God's suffering Servant. He allowed himself to be numbered among sinners. Jesus submitted himself entirely to his Father's will. Many Fathers of the Church explain that Jesus received baptism to identify himself with his people, who for the first time in Jewish history became aware of their sins and of the need of repentance, as a result of John's preaching. The Jews had the traditional belief that only the Gentiles who embraced Jewish religion needed the baptism of repentance, for, as God's chosen people, the Jewish race was holy. Jesus might have been waiting for this most opportune moment to begin his public ministry. The Fathers point out that the voice from the heavenly Father is an adaptation of Psalm 2:17, "*This is my beloved Son,*" and of Isaiah 42:1 referring to the "suffering servant": "*with whom I am well pleased*".

### **Christmas Begins**

When the song of the angels is stilled  
when the star in the sky is gone  
when the kings and the princes are home  
when the shepherds are back with their flocks  
the work of Christmas begins  
to find the lost  
to heal the broken  
to feed the hungry  
to release the prisoner  
to rebuild the nations  
to bring peace among the people  
to make music in the heart.

**(Howard Thurman)**

