

BAPTISM OF THE LORD: January 9th, 2011

The Baptism of the Lord is one of the greatest events in the life of Jesus and is described by all four gospels, and Jesus' baptism by John was a mystical experience that Jesus felt deep within his soul at the crucial turning point of his 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.

A couple of questions: 1) Why did Jesus, the sinless 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. Out of love, he consented to His baptism of death for the remission of our sins. 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 their need for 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 of the Church point out that the words the voice from the heavenly Father speaks are similar to Psalm 2:17, revealing Jesus' identity ("*This is my beloved Son*") and of Isaiah 42:1 referring to the "suffering servant": "*with whom I am well pleased*," revealing Jesus' mission of saving mankind by his suffering and death.

Life messages: 1) The baptism of Jesus reminds us of our identity and mission. First, it reminds us of **who we are and Whose we are.** By baptism we become sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus, members of his Church, heirs of heaven and temples of the Holy Spirit. Hence "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" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1213). Most of us dipped the fingers of

our right hands into the holy water font and blessed ourselves when we came into church today. *Why?* This blessing is supposed to remind us of our baptism. And so when I bless myself with holy water, I should be thinking of the fact that I am a child of God; that I have been redeemed by the Cross of Christ; that I have been made a member of God's family and that I have been washed, forgiven, cleansed and purified by the blood of the Lamb.

Second, Jesus' baptism reminds us 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 so that our Heavenly Father may say to each one of us what He said to Jesus: "You are my beloved son/daughter in whom I am well pleased"; c) to lead a holy and transparent Christian life and not to desecrate our bodies (the temples of the Holy Spirit and members of Jesus' body) by impurity, injustice, intolerance, jealousy or hatred; d) to accept both the good and the bad experiences of life as the gifts of a loving Heavenly Father for our growth in holiness; e) to grow daily in intimacy with God by personal and family prayers, by reading the Word of God, by participating in the Holy Mass, and by frequenting the sacrament of reconciliation; f) to be co-creators with God in building up the "kingdom of God" on earth, a kingdom of compassion, justice and love, and to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.