

January 10, 2010

This weekend we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus and bring to a close our joyous Christmas season. Why was Jesus baptized? He is the eternal Son of God without sin or blemish.

In Sunday's Gospel, John the Baptist explained that he was baptizing the people with water to signify their willingness to turn their lives around in preparation to receive God's saving love. Jesus' cousin, John, further explained that the One who was to come and whose sandals he was not worthy to loose would baptize with the Holy Spirit and purifying fire.

John's Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan was a great theophany. It was a great revelation of Jesus' relationship with the Heavenly Father and with the Holy Spirit. Jesus' Baptism was also a manifestation of His mission. Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's words in Chapter 61:1: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; He sent me to bind up the brokenhearted."

In Sunday's Gospel, Luke tells us that when Jesus was baptized "heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove." And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit to begin His mission as Messiah to cleanse the world of its sins and destroy the forces of evil. Jesus healed those who were in the grip of the devil, cured the sick, and even raised the dead to life.

Beginning with His Baptism, Jesus fulfilled all that the prophets spoke about Him. He established justice on the earth. He was the promised light who showed us the way to the Father, the way to a life of peace and reconciliation. He

showed Himself to us as our source of hope. If we believe in Him and are nourished by His Body and Blood, we gain life in abundance and even everlasting life.

In October 2002, Pope John Paul II gave us five additional Mysteries to meditate upon when we pray the rosary. He called the new set of Mysteries the five Mysteries of Light, the Luminous Mysteries. He suggested that on Thursday, when we pray the rosary, we reflect upon these Mysteries which help us appreciate more deeply Christ's public life. The first Luminous Mystery is Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan. In reflecting upon that Mystery, we ponder that Jesus, the eternally begotten Son of the Father, became one like us in all things but sin to save us from our sins and lead us through the power of the Holy Spirit to the Father. We contemplate the beauty of the face of Christ and appreciate Him as the source of our hope, the way to reconciliation and peace in this life, and our assurance of life everlasting.

Jesus' Baptism also helps us understand the full meaning of our own Baptism. When water was poured over our forehead and we were baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, our sins were forgiven. But there is much more. We became temples of the Holy Spirit and members of the living Body of Christ. We were brought into communion with God so that we might continue the mission of Jesus.

Jesus' Baptism was His public acceptance of the mission entrusted to Him by His Father. Before ascending into heaven, Jesus passed that mission of building the Father's kingdom of truth, peace, justice, and love to all of us who become His living Body through our Baptism.

Through Baptism, we have become Jesus' heart, hands, and lips for others. In the divine plan, each one of us receives the outpouring of God's love so that we

might share God's love with others. To be baptized is a great privilege and an awesome responsibility. We might consider our Baptism a commissioning just as Jesus' Baptism was a commissioning by His Father and empowering by His Holy Spirit to begin His public life and mission.

In the Sacrament of Confirmation, we were further empowered with the Holy Spirit to grow in communion with God and to carry forth the mission of Jesus. Every time we receive the Holy Eucharist, we say, "Amen." That "Amen" is our affirmation to live each day in union with Jesus carrying His love to others.