

Feast (SJ&QA) of the Baptism of the Lord 2021

Christmas season is not just about the celebration and proclamation of Christ's birthday and Jesus' manifestation to the world, but also about the mystery of the Incarnation that comes to its high point with the Baptism of our Lord. It is said birthdays are good for your health. Studies have shown that people who have more birthdays live longer. *Who can ever forget his or her birthday?* For a husband, *"The most effective way to remember his wife's birthday is to forget it once!"* One significant day we often overlook is the day of our baptism. It is an important day because that's when we officially become a Christian. Baptism is the foundation of the sacramental system, so basic to our Christian life that we consider it as our second birthday. *Do you know your birthday in faith?* Today as we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord we are reminded of the day we become members of God's family and our vocation to which we are called.

Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist was undoubtedly considered by the early Church as one of the most significant events in Our Lord's life. Jesus voluntarily submitted himself to the baptism of John, intended for sinners, in order to *'fulfill all righteousness'*. His gesture is a manifestation of His self-emptying (CCC#1224). Only Luke and Matthew tell us about the birth of Jesus, but all four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles mention the Baptism of Jesus. Indeed the event was significantly important because it marked the beginning of Jesus'

public life and ministry. His baptism was a statement not only that God's approval was with him in a special way but also of his eagerness to start telling the world openly of its need for redemption.

Today's feast recalls our own baptism in consecrated waters that cleansed our souls from the state of sin and was the beginning of our relationship with God. As stated by the Catechesis of the Catholic Church, "*Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, (vitae spiritualis iannua) 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 (CCC#1213).*" The carrying out of that mission will only be possible if we are prepared to live in accordance with God's will. We have the knowledge and understanding, but knowing and understanding are not enough. We must learn to take a stand - that simply means standing for what we really believe in, guided by our Christian Faith. As a sign of their baptismal commitment parents and the sponsors are not only to guide but also show good example to their children and godchildren, and are expected to lead them to a better understanding of the sacraments and worthy Christian living.

The baptism of Jesus marks the beginning as well as the commitment to His mission. Moreover, our baptism marks the beginning of our life in God—*our spiritual life*. If our birthday marks the beginning of our

existence, then our baptism marks the beginning of our union with God. That union is primarily and profoundly expressed in a committed life faithful to God. As we start our new year, this feast provides us with an opportunity to review our commitment to Jesus and reflect on our calling as members of God's family.

How do you help instill faith and hope in people's hearts?

Regardless of whether you were baptized when you were a few days old or later in life, our baptism is not merely an event of the past; it is an ever present reality, a constant sharing in the divine life of the Risen Christ. It is a daily invitation to come closer to God and to be helpers in saving and making our world a better place. In our everyday lives we may not have the ability to do great things but we have the power to do good things. That is what the *lighted candle given during our baptism signifies*: we are to show forth Jesus by word and deed wherever we go. *Do you think of this promise when you are challenged to be honest, when you are called to stand up for what you believe?* It is not only a matter of finding and believing in Jesus but above all a matter of doing and witnessing. We reflect the glory of God when we refuse to compromise with evil in any of its forms.

"You are my beloved son with you I am well pleased." These very words can be applied to any of us who lives those baptismal promises faithfully throughout life. *This is the highest form of blessing a person may receive!* We want people to bless us. When we feel blessed *we can*

do anything, face anyone, and service anyhow. The Lord blessed us generously. Let us be generous with our blessings. Our calling is to bless one another with *our love, our presence, and our assurance.* We are to help and inspire one another. We continue to receive his blessing every day of our lives. Finally, let the words of St. Anthony of Padua, one of the greatest preachers of the Middle Ages, inspire us: “*Actions speak louder than words; let your words teach and your actions speak.*” As we renew our baptismal commitment to bear witness to the Good News through our faithful witnessing, let us walk with Jesus and make each day an important day for others as well as for ourselves. Amen!