

The Baptism of the Lord (Year A)

Matthew 3: 13-17

13 Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. 14 John tried to dissuade him. 'It is I who need baptism from you,' he said, 'and yet you come to me!' 15 But Jesus replied, 'Leave it like this for the time being; it is fitting that we should, in this way, do all that righteousness demands.' At this, John gave in to him.

16 As soon as Jesus was baptised he came up from the water, and suddenly the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. 17 And a voice spoke from heaven, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on him.'

Other readings: Isaiah 42:1-4,6-7 Psalm 28 (29) Acts 10:34-38

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord brings the Christmas season to an end. The Solemnity of the Epiphany led us to reflect on the mission of the Lord to bring salvation to all nations. Now we see that mission begin with the reporting by the evangelists of a most significant action of the adult Jesus.

John the Baptist, who has been baptising and preaching repentance as well as instilling hope in the people to look forward to the 'one who is to come', now comes face to face with the Messiah. Jesus, although he is sinless, nevertheless wishes to undergo with the people the baptism of repentance. It is not surprising that John is perplexed and initially unwilling to comply.

The words of Jesus that they should do 'all that righteousness demands' suggest that we are dealing here with the fidelity of the Son of God to enter fully into our damaged humanity.

As in the other synoptic gospels (Mark and Luke) the baptism of Jesus by John is accompanied by a vision and a voice. Jesus sees the Spirit descend on him. It is the Spirit mentioned by Peter to Cornelius in our second reading when he says that 'God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and power'.

The words addressed to Jesus, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on him', echo the words of God in the first reading from the book of Isaiah. This passage is known as the first 'Servant Song'. The prophet presents to us the qualities of true servanthood, qualities which are amply lived out in the life and mission of Jesus. The baptism of Jesus is a clear expression of his will to stand alongside sinners in order to bring us the fulness of life.

How has the celebration of the Christmas season inspired your faith and work?

Why did Jesus seek baptism from John?

We thank God for the incarnation, that the Son of God has taken on himself the joys and sorrows of the human condition.

We pray for fidelity and maturity in living out our own Christian calling to be servants.