

Baptism of the Lord (C)

10th January 2016

‘Giving thanks for our Baptism’

Is 40: *“Here is your God”*

Ps 103: *You send forth Your Spirit ...*

Titus 2–3: *it was for no reason except His own compassion that He saved us*

Lk 3:15–16,21–22: *“someone is coming. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit”*

This final feast of the Christmas season allows us to jump ahead from the events of Jesus’s birth and infancy to the brink of His public ministry. It might seem a huge leap to make. It’s only a fortnight since we had Christmas Day, and yet here we are celebrating the Lord’s Baptism. And yet ... the very point of the Lord’s Incarnation was for Him to gather disciples, form the Church, give the Gospel, die for our sins, rise to bring new life. Whilst the 30 years of hidden life in Nazareth were significant, bestowing a sanctity upon the married life of Joseph and Mary, and a dignity upon family life, yet the greater importance still is the public life of Jesus. And so, the Church doesn’t hang around pondering the infancy, teenage years, adolescence, young manhood, of Jesus ... but presses on quickly to the onset of His public life. And that began with His Baptism.

Why does Jesus come to be baptized? Well — we must begin with realizing that the Son of God needs

nothing from us, nothing from this world as such: He is the infinitely holy, almighty, Son of God. He has no needs. But He does desire that we receive from Him — grace, spiritual life, ... eternal life. So, when He comes for Baptism, it’s not for Him, but for us! He comes to the River Jordan to be amongst sinful humanity as they express a desire for conversion, seeking forgiveness for their sins. St John the Baptist cannot offer that forgiveness or salvation — as he says, “I am *not* the Christ”! But Jesus can! So Jesus comes into that situation — into the world of sinful, suffering humanity — and offers us the saving sacraments! John the Baptist could only make preparations, point out the way, for reconciliation with God; but Jesus can make it happen! And He does. As the Holy Spirit descends on Him, visually, in the form of a dove, so not only is Jesus’s humanity anointed with this outpouring of strength for His new mission, but just as importantly the waters are blessed with the power of the Spirit in readiness for their new, sanctifying role in the Sacrament of Baptism. When Jesus comes to the River

Jordan, then, it's the end of John's *sign*, the "baptism of water," and the start of something newer and far greater, namely the *sacrament*, the "baptism of the Holy Spirit."

Maybe we take our Baptism for granted! And that would be a dreadful shame! Naturally, for many of us our Baptism was when we were infants, and so we have no memories of it — in fact, I don't think I have any recollection of having even seen any photos! But I do know when and where: it was 18 days after I was born, in St Mary's, Clapham Common. It would be good for each of us, at least, to know when and where we were baptized, as a way of recovering that memory; a memory of a very sacred day! Keep the anniversary of your baptism special, for it was the day when you entered into life with Christ. Baptism is the gateway to the rest of the sacramental life; it's the beginning of a new and wonderful relationship with God, not just in this life, but for eternity. It's our entry, too, into the spiritual family of the Church: not just our 1bn brothers and sisters on each continent, but also that part of the family of the Church that are saints in heaven, and that part of the Church that awaits its purification in purgatory. In this, God's holy family, we are able to look after one another in faith, and encourage one another in holiness. Where would we be without each other to

pray for us, keep us faithful to Mass and good works; where would we be without the supreme example of the saints in heaven, who pray for us also, powerfully and constantly?

Let's *not* take our Baptism for granted at all! Let's rejoice that we entered the Christian life that Baptism day — however long ago it was! Jesus came to save us, that day; let's not turn our back on Him in any way; let's not neglect Him who has saved us by the power of His Cross and who pours out on us that forgiveness, that divine friendship, that power to become children of God for ever. Our Baptism should be our guiding principle throughout our life; living up to our Baptism is a challenge, but isn't something we do alone. God's own Holy Spirit given to us that day, to dwell within us, is active in us, making our life so much better, more meaningful, and with greater purpose and destiny than otherwise. *Lord, Holy Spirit, inflame my heart to co-operate with Your promptings every day, so that I may avoid evil, do good, be devout in my love of God, and ceaseless in my charity to others. Holy Spirit, God given to my heart, make me truly live as the baptized Christian you have made me!*