



Deacon Steve Szmuto's Reflection
January 13, 2019 – The Baptism of the Lord
Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11 **Psalms 104: 1b-4, 24-25, 27-30**
Titus 2: 11-14; 3: 4-7 **Luke 3: 15-16, 21-22**

“A voice cries out: In the desert, prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!” (Isaiah 40: 3)

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord marks the close of the Christmas Season (so if you still have the Christmas tree up, you're good through the end of today). Tomorrow, we return to Ordinary Time until the Season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, which arrives late this year on March 6 (as Easter is on April 21, 2019 – its latest occurrence since 2000). The celebration of today's feast is important as our focus in the Liturgy of the Word transitions from the infancy and youth narratives of Christ to the beginning of his public ministry. Jesus' Baptism is directly recorded with slight variations in each of the Synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke, and is indirectly referenced in John's Gospel as well.

Today, the reading from the Gospel of Luke recounts both the appearance of John the Baptist and the Baptism of Jesus

by John in the River Jordan. When John had first arrived on the scene, preaching repentance, and baptizing others as a symbol of purification, many of the people thought that he might be the Messiah. John, with great humility told them that he was not the Christ. He answered: *“I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Luke 3: 16)* Unlike John's symbolic Baptism, Christ would offer a baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

Strictly speaking, there was no reason for Jesus to be baptized; as the Son of God, he was without sin and in no need of repentance. However, it would be a powerful sign that he take up our burdens on our behalf in order to reconcile us with the Father. Participating in the rite was a sign of renewal and strengthening for his mission to come. Following the baptism and while Jesus was at prayer, there was a powerful revelation of his oneness with the Father and the Holy Spirit – one God in the three persons of the Holy Trinity: *“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.” (Luke 3: 22)* Upon being baptized, Jesus went into the desert by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil, before he began his public ministry.

Jesus' baptism foreshadows our own, in that we emerge from the waters to new life. God's gift of Baptism is given to us, an expression of His infinite mercy and love, not because of any deeds we have done. Through the words and water of the sacrament, our sins are washed away and we are renewed and strengthened for our new life in Christ. Later, in the Sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Eucharist, we enter the fullness of the Catholic faith and participate in the reception of the Precious Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Filled with God's Sanctifying Grace, we are purified in the fire of faith and emerge as a new creation. As we heard in the Responsorial Psalm: *“[LORD], when you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.” (Psalm 104: 30)*

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