

The Baptism of the Lord

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. This feast concludes the season of Christmas in the Church Year.

The secular message of Christmas is all finished with the special sales in the few days after the 25th. The Church has a totally different schedule and a totally different meaning for Christmas.

“The Word was made flesh.” (Jn 1:16) from the Gospel of John read in the Christmas Mass at midday, is our invitation to ponder what it means that God became human. That mystery is made even more challenging in today’s Gospel when Jesus is baptized.

Through Jesus, God chose to enter our reality, to share our experience. The baptism is a symbol of that sharing because a very real part of our reality is that we need forgiveness of our sins.

Christmas means that God bought into the whole human package in the birth of Jesus. This included diapers and brushing teeth, learning how to walk and to pound a nail. At an even deeper level, it meant love and goodness were to encounter sin and evil. It meant He who is the way, the life and the truth would ultimately bring this life into conflict with ignorance and violence and their consequences in death. That the Word was made flesh means that God opened the way for us out of the darkness of our broken humanity. It was the beginning of our deliverance from death.

Paul says in the letter to Titus in today’s second reading, ***“When the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit who he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.” (Titus 2:4-7)***

When Jesus became a baby there were consequences. Good and evil were in the final and absolute conflict. Light and darkness, so much part of our troubled journey as humans, were to play out the concluding battle. Love and hatred, which saturate our daily struggle within our hearts, within our families, within our communities and within our world have the ultimate and most consequential conflict. That the Word became flesh not only meant it would lead to the Cross but more importantly, it meant the victory of light and truth and love and life in the Resurrection.

In Jesus, the seeds of victory are sown so love overcomes hatred, ignorance is sucked up into the power of the truth, and life is the last word in the conquest of death. The love of God prevails in Jesus, the Beloved Son.

We hear the Good News of this great event again today in the preface of the Mass for the Baptism of the Lord:

“For in the waters of the Jordan you revealed with signs and wonders a new Baptism, so that through the voice that came down from heaven we might come to believe in your Word dwelling among us and by the Spirit’s descending in the likeness of a dove we might know that Christ your Servant had been anointed with the oil of gladness and sent to bring the good news to the poor.”