# The Summit Online Exploring the Word

### Baptism of the Lord, Year C

#### **GOSPEL**

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A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. Now when all the people had been baptised and while Jesus after his own baptism was at prayer, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily shape, like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you.'

(Luke 3:15-16, 21-22)

#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

#### Points of interest and Catholic lore

- · This feast and the wedding at Cana miracle (next week's gospel) were originally celebrated on the same day as the feast of the Epiphany because they are also considered to be manifestations of the Christ.
- The word *baptism* comes from a Greek word meaning 'to plunge'.
- The first Christians were baptised by being plunged into running streams or rivers, following the practice of John. Later, large fonts were built in churches, and baptism of the faithful, usually adults, was by full immersion.
- The mainstream Christian churches-Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Anglican-recognise the same baptism. If a person is baptised into one of these churches, it is not repeated, even if they move to worshiping in another church.
- · Jesus is clearly attracted by the preaching of the Baptist and submits to his baptism of repentance. Scholars believe that Jesus may have spent some time as a disciple of John the Baptist before embarking on his own public ministry.

#### **EXPLORING THE WORD**

A small text later in the Gospel of Luke offers us a key to today's gospel. During his public ministry, Jesus will say: 'Up to the time of John it was the Law and the Prophets; since then the Kingdom of God has been preached' (Luke 16:16). The baptism of Jesus marks the turning point. Today's gospel tells the story of crossing the threshold from the old order into the new. John very clearly states that despite some people's expectations, he is not the Messiah-the usher of the new order. John points beyond his own time to a future when God's Spirit is given at baptism, and the first of such baptisms belongs to Jesus himself. Immediately after Jesus' somewhat anonymous immersion along with 'all the people', the Spirit does indeed come to Jesus, and the affirming voice from heaven announces Christ's sonship. God has come among us indeed.

- · In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is very aware of the consequences of submitting to the baptism proclaimed by John. Filled with the Holy Spirit, he goes into the desert, where he wrestles with all that he will be forced to forego in taking up his role as God's beloved Son. His resolve is firm, and he announces his mission in the synagogue at Nazareth. You could read together the next chapters of Luke, which trace this resolution.
- What will be the consequences of baptism for you? How will your life change? What will you be sent to do?

#### MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunties for group discussion and personal prayer

- · How strong is your own sense of being 'beloved' and 'favoured' by God?
- · How much time do you spend alone 'at prayer'?
- Encourage each catechumen, along with their sponsor, to visit the baptismal font in the church at some point this week. It may be a good opportunity for sponsors to chat informally about how the journey is progressing.
- Have you ever had an experience of being chosen, singled out for a special role or particular responsibility? How did you feel? Were you able to carry out the task? What challenges did you face? Share your recollections with others.
- Each day this week, take some time alone to pray; listen to the voice from heaven. Use your own name and repeat:

[Name], you are my child, my beloved, my favour rests on you.

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#### SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

Baptism is the first of the seven sacraments of the Church. A sacrament is a sign through which God communicates love, life and forgiveness to us. 'Immersion in water symbolises not only death and purification, but also regeneration and renewal. Thus the two principal effects (of baptism) are purification from sins and new birth in the Holy Spirit' (*CCC*, §1262).

- Explore together the meaning of these two aspects of baptism.
- Examine the Rite of Baptism for Infants, with special emphasis on the prayers and anointing that form part of the rite. How are forgiveness of sin and new birth reflected in the rite?
- It may be an opportunity to discuss with catechumens what will happen at their own baptism or reception ceremony.

#### SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

Like Jesus, every Christian enters the water of baptism, or has it poured over them. The symbolism, especially apparent in the practice of full immersion, is that of the tomb. The person enters into the depths and darkness of the tomb with Jesus and rises to a new life in Christ, symbolised by the white garment worn at baptism.

#### LIVING THE WORD

Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment

- If it is possible, invite the catechumens to attend an infant baptism in your community.
- Gathering at the baptismal font in the church could be a suitable focus, or use a large earthen bowl filled with water. You could speak of the symbolism of water as cleansing and life-giving. Today would be a suitable occasion to use a rite of anointing (*RCIA*, §§98–102). You could sing 'Come to the water' (*GA* 403) or 'God has chosen me' (*GA* 497). Conclude with the blessing in the *RCIA* at §97B.

NOTES