

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 worshipping 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

Opportunities 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.

