

## The Baptism of the Lord, Year A

### GOSPEL

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Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. John tried to dissuade him. 'It is I who need baptism from you' he said 'and yet you come to me!' But Jesus replied, 'Leave it like this for the time being; it is fitting that we should, in this way, do all that righteousness demands.' At this, John gave in to him.

As soon as Jesus was baptised he came up from the water, and suddenly the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice spoke from heaven, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on him.'

(Matthew 3:13–17)

### DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The Jordan River runs the length of Israel, from north of the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea in the south, and is the lifeblood of the land.
- The exact site of the baptism of Jesus by John is unknown, but the traditional site is at Al-Maghtas, about 10.5 kilometres north of the point where the river enters the Dead Sea.
- 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.

### EXPLORING THE WORD

This text introduces Jesus in the first public moment of his adult life. It is significant that the public mission of Jesus begins with his baptism. He has made decisions about his future action, which begins with a long and arduous journey spanning the length of Israel from Galilee to the deep south. This is not a random act. Jesus makes that journey with a single purpose: 'to be baptised by John'. In light of Matthew's presentation of Jesus as the fulfillment and perfection of all that is good in Israel, the conversation between these two figures is fascinating. The Baptist recognises Jesus' greater role in God's plan. He has played the part of the Old Testament prophet in preparing the way. Now that the main player has appeared on the stage, is it not fitting that the Baptist bows out of the action? But Jesus is aware of a bigger picture and insists that things remain as they are 'for the time being' so that the demands of righteousness can be satisfied. Both Jesus and John show an openness to accept God's plan, and in reward, God himself enters the story with words of affirmation and love for the Chosen One. Heaven and earth have met in the person of Jesus.

- Jesus' mission grew out of a profound sense of being loved and chosen by God. You too have been chosen. What might your mission be?
- Look at the first reading from Isaiah. What insight does this provide in understanding your mission?

### MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- How strong is your own sense of being loved and favoured by God?
- What feelings are you experiencing as your own baptism or reception approaches?
- 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.
- Encourage catechumens, along with their sponsors, to visit the baptismal font in the church at some point this week. It may be a good opportunity to chat informally about how the journey is progressing.
- Spend some time each day in quiet contemplation of what the 'voice from heaven' is saying to you and what you must do to be pleasing to God.
- Use these lines from today's collect often this week:

*Almighty ever-living God who, when Christ had been baptised in the River Jordan and as the Holy Spirit descended upon him, solemnly declared him your beloved Son, grant that your children by adoption, reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, may always be pleasing to you.*

## NOTES

- 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. 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.