

## BAPTISM OF THE LORD (January 9, 2022)

The baptism of Jesus that we remember today is considered the beginning or, in the Catechism's words, 'the inauguration of [Jesus'] mission as God's suffering servant' (n. 536). When St. John Paul II gave us the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary (the Mysteries of Light) back in the early 2000's, he named Jesus' baptism as the first of these new mysteries.

This feast brings us to the end of the Christmas season for another year; on Monday/tomorrow we return to Ordinary Time once again. The baptism of Jesus is actually a good transition from the Christmas season to Ordinary Time. Last weekend we celebrated the feast of the Epiphany—the newborn Christ manifested or shown to be Savior of the whole world. His baptism in the Jordan River, occurring thirty years later at the beginning of his public life and ministry, was the occasion for another 'epiphany'...and a much more visible and dramatic one. After Jesus was baptized, St. Luke tells us that the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit visibly descended upon him in the form of a dove, and the voice from heaven says to Jesus: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

A most extraordinary event, to be sure! And that event had to be especially powerful to those who witnessed or heard of it, because up to that time Jesus had to seem in so many ways to be a rather ordinary person. During his infancy, childhood and into his early adulthood, there was nothing apparently out of the ordinary about Jesus to those who knew him where he grew up in the home of Mary and Joseph. He no doubt played with friends as a little boy, and then as he grew he learned carpentry from Joseph. Luke tells us that Jesus grew in wisdom and age and favor before God and men.

Mary and Joseph certainly knew this was no ordinary child, but to the rest of the world there was nothing very remarkable about him. In fact, the gospels clearly say as much. St. Mark, for example, tells us that Jesus, at a time when he had already begun his public ministry, was once teaching in the synagogue of his home town of Nazareth. His listeners couldn't believe what he was saying and doing: "Where did he get all this?...Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary?" In other words: "we know this guy; we saw him grow up—just who does he think he is saying this stuff??"

But that is precisely the point. Once Jesus began his public work, he either amazed or scandalized those around him by his most extraordinary words and deeds. That amazement, that sense of scandal grew and grew for three years until it came to climax at what we remember every year during Holy Week, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday.

And we need to remember; our faith reminds us that this Jesus who was such an extraordinary presence during those three years of his public life and work is no less present to us now than he was 2000 years ago in Bethlehem, Nazareth, Galilee and Jerusalem:

- his presence in and through the sacraments he gave us for our sanctification and growth in holiness and virtue—especially the Eucharist which is the gift of his very Body and Blood;
- his presence in his word and teaching preserved and handed on by the Church to us and to all throughout history by means of sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition;

- his personal and direct presence to each of us in the darkest and most painful moments of life when he reminds us that he knows exactly what we are going through in our suffering...because he himself experienced it all, and infinitely more.

Jesus Christ and he alone—he can do this for us, and he in fact does this for us.

As noted, this feast of the Lord's baptism concludes the Christmas season and leads us into Ordinary Time. "Ordinary" here doesn't have its everyday or dictionary sense of what is normal, routine or typical. Instead, it simply means that part of the Church year that is not Advent/Christmas or Lent/Easter. But if we consider 'ordinary' in that usual everyday or dictionary sense of the word, we could truly say that today and every day of the year is in fact Extraordinary Time. Our day-to-day lives certainly do have some aspects of the usual, the routine, the 'same old same old'. But our faith reminds us, or better yet we need to remind ourselves of the amazing truth that God has come into our world in the flesh-and-blood, born-of-Mary Person of Jesus who nevertheless is at one and the same time God the Son, eternally begotten of the Father as the Father himself declared at the River Jordan.

What a most extraordinary faith we have been given! What an extraordinary blessing and privilege it is for us to know, embrace, love and follow Jesus Christ, the beloved Son with whom the Father is well pleased and by whom we are offered the gift of perfect happiness and eternal joy! There is absolutely nothing that is 'ordinary', 'routine', or 'normal' about Jesus; he is not 'one way among many others' to eternal life as we often hear these days. His words, e.g. "no one comes to the Father except through me"—and his deeds, e.g. rising from the dead—are utterly and completely unique. I pray that we will always grow in our desire to be more closely and intimately one with Jesus in every aspect of life. I pray that we will not be satisfied with a merely 'routine' or 'normal' relationship with him—whatever that may mean. I truly pray that we never lose our capacity to be gratefully amazed and astonished and transformed and changed by this most extraordinary Person, this God-man, Jesus the Christ.