

Baptism of the Lord

Is. 40: 1-5, 9-11; Ps. 104; Tit. 2: 11-14, 3: 4-7; Lk. 3: 15-16, 21-22

In the Gospel for this Sunday, the evangelist Luke, tells us of the transition from John the Baptist to Jesus. In the first part of the Gospel, John continues to baptize the people but he denies that he is the Messiah. He goes further and prophesies that someone more powerful than he is coming. Luke deals with Jesus' baptism in a cursory way. Jesus was baptized, He was praying, then heaven opened and He was anointed by the Holy Spirit that appeared in the form of a dove. And God proclaimed the famous words: *You are my Son, the Beloved: with You I am well pleased.*

From that time forward, Jesus' life changed. No longer was He a carpenter's son, living in obedience to His parents. This was the beginning of His ministry of service, of healing, of teaching, of love. At that point, Jesus publicly became the embodiment of Isaiah's prophesy to the Jews: *Here is your God!*

Jesus had no need for repentance since He was without sin, but He wanted to share in our human experience and to help us share in His divinity. Most of us may not remember our own baptism but it was essentially as simple as Luke described in the Gospel. We were baptized with water, prayers were said, and we were anointed with the Holy Spirit. At this anointing, the baptizing minister said the following words:

God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin, given you a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and welcomed you into His holy people. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet and King, so may you live always as members of His body, sharing everlasting life.

Do we have any doubt that, at that point, God looked at us and said: *This is my son/daughter, the beloved; with you am well pleased?*

Paul, in his letter to Titus, said that Jesus *saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to His mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.* There is a tendency to think that our salvation is based on the fact that we are baptized. But this is not true. Baptism does not give us the right to receive salvation. Our baptism and anointing confers on us the responsibility to share in the ministry of Jesus Christ as priest, prophet and king. We are to carry out this ministry with absolute faith in Jesus. It is this faith in Jesus, as we follow His commandment to love God and our neighbour, that saves us.

Paul goes on to say: *...so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* When someone dies, they often leave us an inheritance. It may be large or small but they leave something behind for us when they die. As Christians, we know that Christ died and He left an inheritance for us also, and that inheritance is everlasting life in heaven for His faithful followers.

It is for us to carry out the ministry that was conferred on us at our baptism throughout our lives, with faith in Jesus, so that we can claim that inheritance.