



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. The Baptism is the end of the Christmas Season. A reminder that the Church sees the Christmas Season starting on December 24<sup>th</sup> at the Vigil Mass (4:00pm or so) ... not on December 1<sup>st</sup>, not on the day after Thanksgiving, and certainly not when the Christmas decorations begin going up in the stores at Halloween!!! The Church recognizes the preparation for Christmas (Advent), but the Christmas Season itself goes on after most people have put their trees on the curb. Even the "Twelve Days of Christmas" isn't quite accurate, since that only takes you to the Epiphany (which we celebrated last Sunday, and which the Church Universal celebrates on January 6<sup>th</sup>). This is why we have continued to have the Christmas decorations in the Church through this weekend.

I love this celebration because it is a reminder of our baptism. Jesus went through the waters of baptism in order to prepare them – to make them holy – for us. And what happened to Jesus in His baptism happened to us in our baptism. As the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus at His baptism, so the Holy Spirit comes to live in us in our baptism. Too often we imagine the Holy Spirit as a dove, or flame of fire, or driving wind – all of which are biblical images of how the Holy Spirit works in our lives. Or sometimes we imagine the Holy Spirit as a way that God comes to touch our lives, but in an amorphous, and almost imaginary manner. But the Holy Spirit is more than that. He is a person – the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, to be exact. The Holy Spirit is God. God Himself humbles Himself to live within us. The Third Person of the Trinity comes to us so that we can be united to the Father and the Son – to enter into the Trinitarian love of God.

This transubstantiates us. As we believe that the bread and wine, offered at the Mass, change their very substance, their very being, into the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ our God – even without changing the outward signs of bread and wine – so do we believe that in baptism, we are changes substantially! While the outward signs of our life may not change (for most of us, we continued to be crying babies), the very substance of what we are has changed forever in baptism. This change is so deep that it will be with us for eternity (even should we choose to be damned to Hell).

So what is this change?

Ahh... how do we speak about invisible realities?! A clue comes in to the words from the Father to the Son in today's Gospel, "**You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased**" (Luke 3:22). In baptism, God the Father makes us His beloved children. We become His sons and daughters. We take on His divinity – certainly not as Adam and Eve had grasped at it. We receive it not as Jesus had it by nature, but by adoption. God adopts us as part of His family. We are changed from the inside out, so that we no longer just are foster children of God, but His very sons and daughters.

This is language we're very familiar with – to a point of forgetting how powerful it is. But this was a radical change of relationship with God. None of the pagans would have thought (or wanted) an intimate, familial relationship with their gods. The gods were to be appeased, to be begged for things, but not to be close to. Even the Jewish people, who had (and have) an intimate relationship with God balked at Jesus calling God His Father. To see each person in Christ as a child of God was a radical innovation – a great revelation of God to humanity, that He longs to be that near to us, that He changes us from the inside out, in order to be close to Him, to be like Him. We become so much like God in this that on mystic was told by Jesus, "If you saw a soul in the state of grace, you would bow down in worship – you would think it was Me."

Let us pray that we may have a greater understanding of this incredible gift that God has given to each of us in Baptism – to be a dwelling place of God Most High, to be His beloved sons and daughters – and that we may live up to the call of love He has for us.