

Baptism of Our Lord 2021

Ok, here's a Bible question:.. which of these events appear in all four of the Gospels: The Birth of Jesus, the Baptism of Jesus,..the Temptation of Jesus,..His first miracle at Cana?...Answer: **Baptism of Jesus...** Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all found this event so important and inspiring that they included it in their Gospel...The Baptism of Jesus marked the launching of His mission as the Son of God,...to bring salvation to a fallen world...It was His coming out party,...His grand opening... and John the Baptist had a big part in setting it in all in motion.. People from all around had been coming to John at the Jordan River , to repent of their sins and have them washed away in the waters of Baptism...This raises the question: Why did Jesus - the only person on the planet without sin - go to John to be baptized?...What sins did Jesus need washed away? ...Why did Jesus want John to baptize Him?

We won't find the answer in Mark's Gospel. But, Matthew's Gospel tells us that when Jesus came to John,...John said to Jesus, "I need to be baptized by You; why are You coming to me ?"...And Jesus essentially told John, "It must be done this way, because it is My Father's will...It is part of His plan and I must obey it."...By being baptized, Jesus was saying YES! to G.'s plan and purpose for His life,.. wherever it would lead,..And we know where it led, don't we?

In His bapt, Jesus embraced God's mission...and in turn, God embraced Him. When Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens opened up,.. the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, came down upon Him,.. and the voice of God the Father publicly affirmed who Jesus was: "You are my beloved Son; .. in You I am well pleased."...In all the dark days that followed, Jesus would be able to look back to that scene at the River and recall those loving words, "You are my beloved son,..."

In obedience to His Father and out of His love for us,..Jesus let John plunge Him into the water, and Jesus took upon Himself the sins of the whole human race – as He would later do on the cross...It's as if Jesus were saying to all sinners , "I'm with you!"...He was washed in the river because WE are not clean,...because WE are sinners...That day at the river, Jesus was baptized by John,...anointed with the Holy Spirit,...and lovingly affirmed by the Father... His mission to gain our salvation began that day, and would end at the cross three years later.

Ok, so what does all this mean for us?...Well, just as Jesus' Baptism launched Him on His mission,...our Baptism launched us on our mission as baptized Christians...We didn't have a dove fly down and gently land on us; we didn't hear God's voice...But - like Jesus - we were anointed by the Holy Spirit,...and our heavenly Father looked down on each of us as His beloved son or beloved daughter,...and provided us with the graces and Holy Spirit power we need to be part of His plan of salvation,...to carry out our mission.

So, what is our mission?...It's the same mission Jesus gave His disciples before He ascended into e: "Go into the world and preach the Gospel to all creation."

That's our mission, folks,... to bring the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ, into the world...because there are people out there who've never had the Good News preached to them;.. they need to hear it...There are people who HAVE heard it, but have forgotten it or rejected it; they need to hear it again...There are people who are hurting, people losing hope, people anxious and fearful about the future...They might be people we barely know, or people we know well,...or people in our own family,..who need to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.

That need has become even more critical during this pandemic which has so radically affected all of our lives...It's more than having to wear a mask and social distancing and staying stocked up on toilet paper...It's the isolation,...the separation from loved ones. ...It's the loss of jobs, not being able to pay the rent or the mortgage...It's small businesses shutting down or struggling to just hang on. It's the growing number of individuals and families who need food and other kinds of assistance...It's the long term harmful effects the pandemic is having on our kid's education...And when we add to all this the political and racial turmoil that's dividing our nation, there's a lot that can cause fear, anxiety, hopelessness and depression..."Is the virus ever going to end?...Will the vaccines work?... Will we ever get back to normal?...Will we ever learn to respect each other's differences and work together to make things better?"

It's times like this that we need to share the Good News that Jesus – the Son of God – knows what it's like to live a human life,...to face troubles,...to endure suffering,...to be fearful about the future...He knows what we have to deal with. ...He's been through it all...The Good News is He didn't leave us to deal with it alone...He is always with us as He promised He would be...He is with us in the constant presence of the Holy Spirit working in our lives...He is with us in the gift of the Eucharist, His precious Body and Blood,...He is with us in the good people, the angels, that God sends to us...This is the Good News God wants all His people to hear and to draw upon as a source of strength and courage and hope in hard times...This is the Good News that we who have been baptized in Jesus Christ are to bring to those who need to hear it.

Now, you might be thinking, "I can't do that, Deacon Ron...That's your job and Fr. George's job."...Well, let me remind you of these words of St. Francis: "Preach the Good News always; if necessary, use words."...St. Francis is saying you don't have to preach using words... You can preach the Good News of Jesus Christ to others by LIVING the Good News...You can tell others how Jesus can make a difference in their life by letting them see how Jesus is making a difference in your life.

But, there are times when you CAN use words to help others come to know Jesus. Some years ago, I witnessed a 3½ year old boy named Tyler do just that at a gathering downstairs in Assumption's old church hall...Tyler took his little friend Becky by the hand and led her upstairs into the church...As I quietly followed behind them to keep an eye on them,...I could hear Tyler say to Becky as they entered the church, "We have to be very quiet; Jesus might be sleeping."...When they got to the baptismal font, ...he showed her how to make the sign of the cross.

It was so cute...Then, Tyler took Becky to look up at the statue of Mary, and he said to her, "This is Jesus's Mother,"...

Tyler then reverently led Becky over to the large crucifix on the wall,...and as the two of them stood gazing up at the suffering Jesus,...he whispered to her, "You know, Jesus died for us." ...Then placing his hand on his chest, Tyler told his friend, "You can talk to Jesus in your heart."...At that point, I almost fell to my knees as I recalled the words of Jesus, "*Let the little children come to me, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*"...Here was this 3 ½ year old child so proud of his religion, his faith, his savior, that he just had to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with his friend.

My friends, we all love to share good news, right?...We can't wait to share good news with our family, friends, co-workers, people we run into at Wegmans or Target...What better news to share with someone than the Good News of Jesus Christ alive and active in our lives? Our Baptism probably took less than one hour in church,...but it began a faith journey that will take us through the rest of our life and hopefully on to heaven... Our mission – given to us at our Baptism - is to take as many people along with us as we can. Amen!

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