



Some reflections inspired by online copyrighted commentaries and homilies

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Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

When I was growing up in my early years, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord always confused me. Then, as today, the feast ends the Christmas season. Then, as today, the church was still decorated with poinsettias and the Christmas crèche. But as a ten-year old boy, I could not figure out what the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord had to do with Christmas. The readings do not mention Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, or the Magi. They describe Jesus being baptized by John in the Jordan River. Jesus is no longer a child. He is an adult, beginning his public ministry.

Now, what does the Baptism of the Lord have to do with Christmas? Everything. Because what we celebrate at Christmas is not simply the birth of a baby, but God's decision to become human like us. What we celebrate at Christmas is the beginning of a life that will continue into adulthood, when Jesus will heal and teach, when he will give his life for our salvation and be raised up as Lord. And in all of this, Jesus is fully human like us.

This is clear in today's gospel when Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist. We know that John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. So why would Jesus be baptized by John? Jesus had no sins to be forgiven. As the son of the Father, Jesus was without sin. And yet, in today's gospel we see Jesus standing in line with sinners, waiting for John's baptism. Jesus is there because he wants to make it clear that he does not intend to save us from a distance. He chooses to be a part of us, to mingle and identify with sinners. Beginning at his birth and continuing out throughout his entire life, Jesus was like us in all things but sin.

This is good news for us, because it means that whatever we experience in life, good or bad, is something that Jesus also experiences as one of us. We love children. The gospel shows us Jesus, blessing and embracing children. We love nature. The gospel tells us that Jesus extolls the beauty of the lilies of the field. We love to celebrate with family and friends and the gospel shows us Jesus celebrating with his family at the wedding feast of Cana. We grieve the loss of the people we love. Jesus grieved the loss of his foster father, Joseph, and his friend Lazarus. We fear the future and our coming death. Jesus feared his death as he struggled in the garden at Gethsemane. We are disappointed when family and friends let us down. Jesus was disappointed when his disciples did not understand him and when they abandoned him and fled during his passion.

Jesus knows everything that happens to us, all that we experience. Even though he is without sin, he stands with us in our human condition. That gives us confidence and hope. Jesus always knows what we feel. Jesus always knows what we fear. Whatever happens to us, Jesus always understands.

Reflection by Fr. G M. Smiga