

“After the Lord was baptized, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit descended upon him like a dove, and the voice of the Father thundered: This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” What I just read was the entrance antiphon for today’s Feast, the Baptism of Jesus. On Sundays, the entrance antiphon usually gets replaced with the opening hymn so this might not be something that you are familiar with. Something else that you aren’t familiar with is the way that today’s feast looks when it is shown on the page of the Roman Missal--the book the priest uses to celebrate Mass. The entrance antiphon is printed and then right below it is an instruction to say the Gloria. If we were to do exactly what it shows on the page, without the sign of the cross, or the greeting or the penitential rite, it would sound like this:

“After the Lord was baptized, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit descended upon him like a dove, and the voice of the Father thundered: This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”...Gloria to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to people of goodwill...”

This struck me because the Gloria is associated with our Lord’s birth, not his baptism. There is nothing in scripture about the angels singing at our Lord’s baptism but I don’t see why that would not have occurred. Jesus’ Father said that he was well pleased. I think it is safe to assume that the heavenly host would join him in expressing his pleasure. Baptism—whether it is the Baptism of the Lord or our own baptisms—is a great reason for rejoicing and celebration.

Would the angels have been rejoicing because Jesus needed baptism? No. Jesus was completely free of sin. He had no need of baptism, in fact when Jesus showed up on the banks of the Jordan, John the Baptist asked him, “I need to be baptized by you, yet you are coming to me?” In allowing himself to be baptized by John, Jesus was allowing himself to be counted among sinners. His baptism was a foreshadowing of his Passion, Death and Resurrection. By accepting his baptism, Jesus was fully accepting the will of His father and he was freely offering his life in exchange for our own. This is why I can hear the angels singing in the background of this great event of salvation history. Through his baptism, Jesus sanctified the waters so that through their use in our own baptisms, we can become new creations and adopted children of God.

Baptism is the gateway to life in Christ. Our Lord’s baptism was the beginning of his public ministry. Our baptisms are the beginnings of our lives as Christians. Every year thousands of people are initiated into the church through the sacrament of baptism at the Easter Vigil—I believe we have three who will be doing that with us this year in our parish. This is a conscious choice on their

parts to become a part of God's family; they will probably remember that night for the rest of their lives. Many of us, however, were baptized as infants; our parents made that decision for us. Yes, the baptisms were valid and we received all of the same graces as the adults and teens that will get baptized at Easter, but I doubt any of us remember that day.

How many of us know the dates of our baptisms? I know mine because I had to get a copy of my baptism certificate from the Presbyterian Church when I went through RCIA. I also had to have it before I could get ordained; otherwise I probably wouldn't know that date. It was April 7 which coincidentally is the day after the anniversary of my favorite soon-to-be saint Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati's baptism. Baptism is the gateway sacrament, yet I think for most of us, once it is done, it is done. We might have a nice celebration on that particular day, but do we celebrate it the next year or the year after that? Maybe some of you do...if you do, please keep doing it. Whenever I baptize little children, I always encourage the parents to try and celebrate the anniversary of the baptism the same way they would the child's birthday. I encourage all of us to do this with the children in our lives. Bring out the baptism candle and the white garment and show it to them. As they get older, explain the significance of these items to them. Talk to them about how they are beloved children of God. Help them to understand that God so loved the world that he sent his only Son to die for them...to die for each one of us...so that we could have eternal life.

Jesus publicly accepted this mission when he allowed John to baptize him that day in the Jordan River. And after his baptism... "the heavens were opened, and the Spirit descended upon him like a dove, and the voice of the Father thundered: This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Thanks be to God that Jesus did that for us. Glory to God in the highest. Amen.