

HOMILY DELIVERED BY REV. FR. JUDE EMUNEMU ON JANUARY 4, 2026 @ ST. ANTHONY CATHOLIC CHURCH, JEAN LAFITTE, LA BEING THE FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD, YEAR A

THEME: "*THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED*"

Today's Feast of the Baptism of the Lord brings the Christmas season to a close and marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. At the Jordan River, Jesus steps into the waters not because He needs repentance, but because He chooses to stand in solidarity with us sinners. The sinless One stands among sinners, revealing a God who draws near, not from a distance, but from within our human condition.

Why, then, does Jesus accept baptism? The early Church Fathers give us profound insight. St. Gregory Nazianzen says that Christ was baptized not to be purified, but to **purify the waters** of our own baptism, so that, through them, we might be cleansed. St. Augustine teaches that in his humility, Christ shows us the path to life: by entering the waters of sinners, he

raises sinners to new life. Jesus identifies Himself completely with broken humanity, even as He remains without sin.

At the moment of His baptism, we were told that **the heavens were opened**. This is a powerful sign that through Christ, the separation caused by sin is being healed. As St. John Chrysostom explains, heaven opens because access to the Father is restored in Christ. What was closed by Adam is reopened by the new Adam.

The prophet Isaiah, in the first reading, helps us understand what is happening. Jesus is the *Chosen Servant*, upon whom the Spirit rests, sent to bring justice, to open blind eyes, and to free those trapped in darkness. At His baptism, Jesus was anointed for mission—not with ordinary oil, but with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who

hovered over the waters of creation now descends upon Christ, signaling a new creation and a new beginning for humanity.

The voice from heaven is unmistakable: “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*” This is not merely affirmation; it is revelation – in fact, an epiphany of Christ’s divinity. God the Father publicly declares the divine identity of Jesus. As at Mount Sinai, God speaks, and Psalm 29 reminds us that the voice of the Lord is powerful, majestic, and life-giving. That voice still speaks to us today, calling us to listen to Jesus, to trust Him, and to follow Him—not selectively, but completely.

In the second reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter proclaims that Jesus was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and power, and that He went about doing good. Baptism is not

an endpoint; it is the beginning of a life transformed and sent.

What happened to Jesus at the Jordan happens to us at the font.

Through baptism, we are freed from sin, adopted as beloved children, filled with the Spirit, and entrusted with a mission – to continue doing good.

Baptism is not optional or symbolic alone—it is necessary for salvation because it unites us to Christ's death and resurrection. It gives us a new identity and a new way of living.

On this Feast day, we are called to remember who we are: baptized, beloved, and sent. Today, let us reclaim the grace of our own baptism. Listen again to the Father's voice. Follow the Son. Walk in the power of the Spirit. This is our identity—and our mission.