

The Baptism of the Lord Jesus: 2022: Cycle C (*optional readings for Cycle C*): Is 40: 1-5, 9-11; Ps 104; Titus 2: 11-14; 3: 4-7; Lk 3: 15-16, 21-22

“The Gift of Baptism”

1. We celebrate the mystery of Baptism today: Christ’s and our own. **Baptism** is the Sacrament by which spiritually we die and rise to new life with Christ: *the original sin* (the state of spiritual alienation we are all born into because the first human beings turned their backs on God and sinned) *is wiped away as well as all actual sins and we become a member of the Mystical Body of Christ in the Church.* As St. Paul puts it the old man is buried and the new man arises. It however is not **magic** - we must live out our baptismal promises each day with God’s help (grace). Baptism is a free gift of the Lord to us; we don’t earn it which is why we give it to infants; but the grace of Baptism, if received when we are an infant must be nourished and matured by the good example of our parents and godparents and much prayer. This is why sometimes as priests we must delay the baptism of a child until we see that the **parents** are going to take seriously the responsibility of raising their child in the Catholic Faith. Sometimes we have to say, *let’s see you guys get into the habit of coming to Mass for a few months and then we will baptize your child.* If Baptism is delayed, it is not a question of punishing the child, but just assuring that someone will be there to set the example for the child in the ways of Catholic Faith. Sometimes this falls to the grandparents or extended family, but ideally it is the parents. The **godparents** also have an essential role to play. It is only necessary to have one, but traditionally families pick two (*if two, it has to be one man and one woman*), one of whom must be an active practicing Catholic in a marriage recognized by the Church. The other one, if not Catholic, must be a Christian and a good example of virtuous living. Simply picking a family member or old friend is not the way to go, unless they meet the spiritual conditions mentioned above. Sometimes if they don’t, it is a teaching moment for the prospective godparent since you can remind them that if they get their life back on track spiritually, then you will pick them for the next child you have - if God so blesses a family. And if they get mad sometimes that is the price we pay for being faithful to the Lord and His Church- pray for them.☺

2. Why is Jesus baptized today, when he is sinless? He is baptized as a **model of humility** for us and to begin **his public ministry** of redeeming the human race. Jesus is a model for us in this regard because all of us are called to grow in the virtue of humility and to rely on the Holy Spirit and grace (2nd reading today), by **being a joyful witness** of God's love and truth to others and reminding them that we put total trust in God (1st reading today), and **serving** God and our fellow men and women, in whatever unique ways God calls us to, in a true gift of self. *In this New Year, let us pray in a special way to see where God wants us to serve better.*
3. By Christ's baptism, He begins the process of redemption in a **public way**, which began at the moment of His incarnation in a **hidden way** – so it closes out **the Christmas season** very nicely. We know after the completion of His public ministry on the altar of the Cross, the human race now has the opportunity in the Sacrament of Baptism to be purified by water and the Holy Spirit and be created anew. *The Blessed Trinity wants to set us free from our slavery to sin, spiritual blindness, and ultimately from eternal death (Hell).* However **it is a daily battle** for us human beings because although the Sacrament of Baptism wipes away the original sin and any actual sins, our nature is still weak and wounded and so tends toward sin and evil (**concupiscence**) and hence it takes a lifetime of choosing good over evil to be molded into the image of Christ (to become a saint). This is also why **we must be patient with ourselves and others: you don't become a saint overnight!** It is a daily process of taking the next good step in holiness, sometimes slipping back and always staying close to the Sacrament of Confession in which we are both forgiven and further healed in our nature. Every time we receive **the Sacrament of Confession** well prepared and with a firm purpose of amendment it is in essence like **a Second Baptism**. What an awesome way to look at the sometimes intimidating process of confessing our sins! Remember the Holy Spirit wants to heal us and restore us to the likeness of God. Let us make a daily resolution to live out our baptismal promises well: to 1. Reject sin. 2. Reject satan and all of his works and empty show. 3. Embrace the Lord and the Catholic Faith, which we will all profess together in a minute (the Creed). God bless you.