

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD [A]

Isaiah 40: 1 – 5, 9 – 11

Titus 2: 11 – 14; 3: 4 – 7

Luke 3: 15 – 16, 21 – 22

Today, in this Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, we meet the adult Jesus standing in the waters of the River Jordan, having been baptised by John the Baptist in a: “Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” [Lk. 3: 3](#)

It seems to me, because it comes right after the great Feasts of Christmas and Epiphany, it’s sort of overlooked.

But it’s actually the cardinal – the lynch-pin – Feast that holds together Christmas and Easter: it’s of vital importance in the history of our salvation.

It isn’t just the moment when Jesus reached His full maturity, and realised who He was, and what His Father had called Him to do.

It isn’t just His ‘eureka’ moment; it isn’t just the moment of His ‘vocational experience,’ to borrow a phrase from psychology.

No; it’s far deeper, and more profound than any explanation supplied by psychology.

This is, above all, the moment when heaven is torn open and, God, the Trinity of Love – Father, Son, and Spirit – is unveiled as Jesus rises from the waters of the Jordan.

Veiled at His birth in frail flesh, but unveiled for our sakes here, at His Baptism; Jesus has come, not only to reveal His Divinity to us, but also to reveal us to ourselves.

But why on earth did Jesus, the sinless Son of God, need to be baptised to wash away His sin?

The answer is given by Paul, writing to the Christians in Corinth: “For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” [2 Cor. 5: 21](#)

Through His Baptism, Jesus, of whom John the Baptist says: “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” [Jn. 1: 29](#) binds Himself irrevocably to all men and women, for all time.

At His Baptism, Jesus loaded the burden of all of our sins, and guilt upon His shoulders, and bore it down into the depths of the Jordan.

He began His journey to the Cross and Resurrection – the journey through which He saved us – by stepping into the place of sinners at the Jordan.

He took upon Himself even the condition of our sinfulness, Himself having not sinned.

The: “One more powerful.” [Lk. 3: 16](#) assumes the position of weakness; and it’s precisely in this that Jesus is the Father’s: “Beloved Son.” [Lk. 3: 22](#)

Now, if Jesus didn’t sin, how could He really be like us? How could He be fully human?”

I think we don’t understand the humanity of Jesus because we misunderstand our humanity as well as our sin.

Yes, He’s truly God; and yes, He’s truly human: and He’s truly human precisely because He doesn’t sin.

All of our sin is nothing other than the rejection of the truth of our humanity as God created it to be.

Jesus – the ‘True human’ – by His utter acceptance of our fallen humanity, His drinking of our cup fully, His sharing of our wounded condition, reverses our sinful rejection of our true humanity.

And the key moment, I think, in all of this is when Matthew, in his Gospel, tells us that: “Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’

But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.’” [Mt. 3: 13 – 15](#)

What does Jesus actually mean by, ‘to fulfill all righteousness?’

To fulfill all righteousness, He submits lovingly, willingly, and humbly to the saving power of His Father, and His plan for the salvation of humanity.

Jesus totally identifies Himself with us sinners; although He Himself is without sin.

He came to share in our humanity so that we may share with Him in His Divinity.

This act by Jesus of plunging into the sin of the world, is an anticipation of the Cross and Resurrection. And the whole significance of Jesus' Baptism, the fact that He bears, 'all righteousness,' is fulfilled perfectly in those two future events.

The fact that Jesus: "Who, being in very nature God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped [but] humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!" Phil. 2: 6

The fact that Jesus submits to being Baptised is His acceptance of death on the Cross for our sins.

And the voice of the Father as Jesus comes up from the waters, declaring: "This is my Son, whom I love." Mt. 3: 17 is the Father's guarantee of the Son's Resurrection because of His unfailing faithfulness. When we were Baptised, we went under the waters to have our sin washed away because Jesus had taken that sin into His Body on the Cross.

When we were Baptised, we were clothed with Jesus: yet, sadly, we so often leave our Baptism at the font, and go out into the rest of our lives naked, and without the Lord.

Instead, because of the power of Baptism, we should be entering into communion with Jesus through an intimate, personal encounter with Him that will last throughout our lives, and into eternity.

Because: "We are Christians only if we encounter Christ." And: "Our happiness depends, in the end, on the encounter with Jesus and on friendship with Him." Pope Benedict XVI: Wednesday Audience September 3 2008 and Address to Students April 10 2006

Every Sunday we say the Creed as a way of retaking for ourselves the promises made for us at our Baptism.

If our faith has become lukewarm; if we don't have that intimate friendship with Jesus, let's rekindle the grace given to us in Baptism by not merely reciting – but really meaning – the words of the Creed this evening/morning when we say, 'I believe.'