

Our Lady of Perpetual Help
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FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD [YEAR B]



Dear Friends in Christ,

A family arrived at their parish church on the day scheduled for the Deacon to baptize their baby daughter. The infant's five-year-old sister watched the arrival of family and friends with great interest and eagerly took her place between her parents at the font. When the service was over, she asked her father why water had been poured on the baby's head. When he tried to explain the meaning of the cleansing waters of Baptism, the little girl protested: "But daddy, that's not the part of her that's dirty!"

In the Gospels "Baptism" refers to three things: (1) John's baptism with water as a sign that the people repented of their sins, and wanted to wash them away. Usually, it was only converts to the Jewish Faith who were baptized, but now even Jews were called to accept that they were sinners. John's baptism was only the first step of a journey, a sign, a start, as he himself said: "I baptize you with water to show that you have repented, but the one who will come after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11). (2) Jesus' Baptism with the Holy Spirit – a baptism of rebirth, which gives a whole new life to those who receive it. As St. Paul wrote to newly-baptized Christians: "When you were baptized, you were buried with Christ, and in baptism you were also raised with Christ....You were at one time spiritually dead...But God has now brought you to life with Christ" (Colossians 2:12-13). (3) John's baptism of Jesus Himself in the River Jordan, as we heard in today's Gospel reading. The sky opened, then the Spirit descended, and a voice from heaven said: "You are my Beloved Son." This is sometimes called a baptism of revelation or Epiphany of the Blessed Trinity, in the sky, the Spirit and the voice. It was as

if God had broken down a barrier between heaven and earth – as the prophet Isaiah said to God: “Tear the sky open and come down” (Isaiah 64:1). The Spirit hovering over Jesus and the water is almost exactly the same as the Spirit hovering over the waters at the beginning of creation, as we read in the Book of Genesis. Jesus is the “new Adam” of the new creation or re-creation of the world. Finally, the Voice from heaven, from God the Father, identifies Jesus as His own Dear Son.

Even though most of us won't remember the day when we were baptized, amazing things happened at that time. The Original Sin of pride and disobedience by our first ancestors, whom we name Adam and Eve, and which stains the soul of everyone who is born, including even the most adorable, innocent-looking baby, is washed away. We are clothed with Christ's righteousness, we are “Christened;” the seed of God's own life is planted in our souls, we became temples of the Holy Spirit, members of the Church, and truly born again of water and the Spirit. This is how St. Paul further describes our Baptism: “You have been raised to life with Christ, so set your hearts on the things that are in heaven...Keep your minds on things there, not on things here on earth...Your real life is Christ, and when He appears, then you will appear with Him and share His glory!” (Colossians 3:1-4.) When we were baptized, in a very real sense, the sky opened above us, the Spirit of God descended upon us, and a voice said to us: “You are my child, today I have become your father” (Psalm 2:7).

Just as Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of His public ministry and mission, so our own baptism marks the start of the special mission that God has given to each of us. And the way I can best carry out my mission is to look at my life right now, and to try my very hardest to live it in a loving, caring, gentle way, just like Jesus. Let us reconnect with and experience the God living in our hearts, and also in others – loving, serving and honouring them in all humility. We are all beloved children of God, so let us live always in the light – holy, transparent and respecting our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit, and participating as fully as we can in the life of our Church. In a few minutes time, I will invite you all, wherever you may be listening to this broadcast, to renew your own baptismal promises, freely and enthusiastically.

Allow me to offer you a few points for you to reflect on personally, or as part of a discussion group:

1. Am I fully aware of the life-changing things that happened to me when I was baptized?
2. How can I live out my baptism dignity and commitment better today and in the future?
3. If I am a Godparent, how can I help my Godchild to know, love and serve Jesus more and more?

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Blessings, Fr Frank