

## The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord



In the liturgical calendar, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord signifies the end of the Christmas season. The Baptism of the Lord is notable because it marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry and confirms his identity as the Son of God.

John's baptism was the baptism of repentance (Matthew 3:11), but Jesus was sinless and had no need of repentance – so why was he baptized? Even John was taken aback at Jesus coming to him. John recognized his own sin and was aware that he, a sinful man in need of repentance himself, was unfit to baptize the spotless Lamb of God: "I need to be baptized by you and yet you are coming to me?" (Matthew 3:14) Jesus replied "*Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.*" (Matthew 3:15)

### **There are several reasons why it was fitting for John to baptize Jesus:**

- To mark the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus.
- To be publicly heralded and recognized by his forerunner, John, the "voice crying in the wilderness" prophesied by Isaiah, calling people to repentance in preparation for their Messiah (Isaiah 40:3).
- By baptizing Jesus, John was declaring to all that here was the One they had been waiting for, the Son of God, the One he had predicted would baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matthew 3:11)
- The Lukan description of the opening of the heavens show that the Reign of God is beginning to break into human history in the person of Jesus – the mercy and power of God about to be unleashed.
- Blessings of God in the person of the Holy Spirit, anointing Jesus for his earthly ministry, showing that indeed this was the Son of God.

Jesus' baptism also showed that He identified with sinners and the faithful remnant of Israel. Think of St Paul's passage in Romans 6:3-5:

His baptism symbolized our baptism into His own death, dying with Him and rising free from sin and able to walk in the newness of life. His righteousness would fulfil all the requirements of the Law for sinners who could never hope to do so on their own. When John hesitated to baptize the sinless Son of God, Jesus replied that it was proper to "fulfil all righteousness." (Matthew 3:15) By this He alluded to the righteousness that He provides to all who come to Him.

Perhaps most importantly, the occasion of the public baptism recorded for all generations to come the perfect embodiment of the triune God revealed in glory from heaven. The testimony directly from heaven of the Father's pleasure with the Son and the descending of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus (Matthew 3:16-17) is a beautiful picture of the Trinitarian nature of God. It also depicts the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit in the salvation of those Jesus came to save. The Father loves the elect from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4); He sends His Son to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10); and the Spirit convicts of sin (John 16:8) and draws the believer to the Father through the Son. All the glorious truth of the mercy of God through Jesus Christ is on display at His baptism.