

## 2019 JESUS' BAPTISM

From His earliest days, Jesus would have known that He was the Messiah and that His cousin, John, was called to be the herald of the Messiah.

And so when Jesus heard that John was baptising in the River Jordan, He would have known that the time for Him to fulfil His identity as the Messiah was imminent and that His tranquil life as the Village Carpenter of Nazareth would have to come to an end. Jesus, obedient to the quiet prompting of the Holy Spirit, headed for the River Jordan.

Having listened to John's preaching, Jesus made the request to be baptized.

It has often been asked why Jesus should have asked for Baptism. After all, John's Baptism was a sign of a person's repentance from sin and Jesus had no sin.

The waters of the Jordon had been made filthy by the sins washed into them through John's baptising. In being immersed into this sin-filled water, Jesus was symbolically immersing Himself into all the sins of humanity. As the waters flowed over Him, He, the Sinless One, took upon Himself all the filth of humanity's sin.

John the Baptist understood this. An hour or so later he would point to Jesus and say: "Behold the Lamb of God".

Once a year on the Day of Atonement- often called 'Yon Kippur'- the High Priest of Israel would place his hands over a Lamb and lay upon it the sins of the Jewish nation. The Lamb would then be sacrificed on the Altar of the Temple as a sign of the nation's repentance from sin.

In being baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus was declaring Himself to be the Lamb of Sacrifice for all of humanity. Three years later in a blazing act of perfect love He would be sacrificed on the Altar of the Cross to heal the disastrous chasm between God and humanity caused by sin.

St Luke tells us that as soon as Jesus had been baptised in the River Jordan by St. John the Baptist, He sought a place to be alone so that He could reflect and pray on the ramifications of His Baptism.

During this time of intense prayer, the Heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove.

It was a moment of theophany... a moment when God revealed God's very self. Speaking directly to Jesus, the Father said: "You are My Son, the Beloved; My favour rests on You."

By these words, the Father confirmed Jesus as the Lamb of God- the One called to take upon His shoulders culpability for all human sin and to bring redemption to humanity.

The difference between Jesus' Baptism and our Baptisms must be noted very carefully. They have exactly the opposite signification. While Jesus' Baptism was a sign of Him being immersed in our lives and taking upon Himself the guilt of our sin, our Baptisms are a sign of our rejection of sin and of our becoming immersed into the life of God. Through our Baptisms we are divinised. We are made sons and daughters of God.

When we enter any Catholic Church, we pause at the font and reach out to sign ourselves with water which has been especially blessed for Baptisms. It is a poignant reminder to us of our own Baptisms- that sublime moment when we were first claimed for Christ, when the Holy Spirit came to dwell within us and we became bonded to God

Over the last week I have been at the Cistercian Monastery at Kopua for 5 wonderful days of prayer, reflection and silence. I like to go to Kopua every three years because it was there, 32 years ago, that I finally made the decision to become a priest. For me there is no horizon between heaven and earth at Kopua. Staying at Kopua is to be swamped by God's presence. It allows me to refocus on what I have been called to be when I finally responded to God's persistent call to the priesthood.

Our 1<sup>st</sup> Reading today is an excellent one for all of us as we face up to the realities of a new year. We are told that God delights in those who do not quench the wavering flame of faith in their friends but try to blow the spark back into fire. It tells us that God rejoices over those who reach out to free people from the dark dungeons they have allowed themselves to plunge into. Yes that is what we are called to do.

Today we begin Ordinary Time for another year. The Jesus Who will be presented to us during the 32 Weeks of Ordinary Time this Year is from St. Luke's Gospel. We will meet Christ- the Healer, the Friend of widows and orphans. We will meet Jesus, Who shared a table with tax-collectors and sinners, and spent nights in prayer. May it be a fruitful journey for all of us!

Let us now renew the promises made by us- or for us- on the great day of our Baptisms. Let us once again reject all sin and, believing in the great truths of Faith, live together in harmony as brothers and sisters within our Christian community.