

# The Baptism of the Lord

## Year C

### *The Baptism Of The Lord.*

*The Father anointed his beloved son, Jesus, with the Holy Spirit and with power, to bring healing and peace to all the nations.*

*(Readings: Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6-7. Here is my servant in whom my soul delights.*

*Acts of the Apostles 10: 34-38. God has anointed him with the Holy Spirit.*

*Matthew 3: 13-17. As soon as Jesus was baptised he saw the Spirit of God coming down on him.)*

It is often the case that beginnings are not remembered because they don't seem important at the time, being just another, ordinary day, with nothing much happening, and with no thought of it being any different to all the other 'ordinary' days.

Even so, some events in our lives become important because, with the benefit of hindsight, we see that it was then that something significant started. It was then that we met that 'special person'. It was then that our life was changed. And when we remember that time, that moment, that event, we give it a significance that wasn't seen, or recognised at the time.

Of course, there are beginnings that we do know, and recognise as important at the time such times as baptisms, marriage, ordinations, and alike. And we like to mark these beginnings as important by surround them with ceremony, to give them an added sense of occasion. So, relatives and friends are rallied, photographers are hired, priests officiate, solemn words are spoken, and vows are made, cameras and mobile phones click away, carefully chosen music is played, and there is an atmosphere of real rejoicing.

But there is also a certain, palpable edginess in the air, since no matter how grand, how significant, it is only that, a beginning. Those involved, or concerned, wonder whether they will be able to honour the solemn words, whether they have the capacity to live up to commitments and responsibilities they are taking on. All beginnings are risks. – And all beginners need help!

We rarely, if ever, think of Jesus as a 'beginner', just as we never really think of him needing help. That said, these are precisely the two things we celebrate in today's feast. Jesus makes a beginning to his ministry. And he receives help in the power of the Holy Spirit.

All four Gospels agree that John the Baptist was very important in the life of Jesus. It is the towering figure of John that stands between the hidden life of Jesus and his public ministry.

Before Jesus goes to John he is merely known by the local people, simply, as 'the son of a carpenter', who stays in the small town of Nazareth. After his time with John, this simple 'carpenter's son from Nazareth', becomes widely known as a wandering preacher, a visionary teacher with a unique and prophetic mission.

Something happened to Jesus while he was with John. He underwent a change, a change that gave his life an entirely new direction. It is while he is with John, that Jesus makes his big beginning. As Saint Peter says, “Jesus of Nazareth began in Galilee after John had been preaching baptism.”

John was, without doubt, a very important turning-point in the life of Jesus, so much so, that Jesus, himself, says of him later, “Of all the children born of women, there is no one greater than John” (Luke 7:28). And in the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel, we are told that the first disciples of Jesus, were originally John’s disciples. In fact, John was such an important figure, that many thought that he was the Messiah, as Luke tells us in today’s Gospel.

One of the reasons people thought that was because, like many others, Jesus went to John to be baptised. Perhaps that is why Luke has the Baptist in prison, before telling the story of Jesus’ baptism to assure his readers of the primacy of Jesus!

In today’s Gospel we hear how, after his baptism, Jesus is at prayer. The opening of the heavens is a signal for the descent of the Holy Spirit. And we can see the Old Testament backdrop for this scene in Isaiah when he writes (Is.63:15-19):

Look down from the heavens and regard us...  
Lord do not hold back, for you are our Father.  
O that you would rend the heavens and come down...

Luke celebrates the time when God no longer holds back, but ‘rends the heavens’, to signal the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. And he is anointed for his public ministry by the Holy Spirit, the great ‘enabler’, who helps people achieve God’s plan.

And so, Jesus is not alone when he makes his great beginning. He begins his journey in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in the love of the Father. He starts out on a difficult road that will eventually lead to an appointment with death.

As we celebrate Jesus’ great public beginning, we look at our own beginnings. And if they look a bit shabby, or half-hearted, we take consolation from the Gospel challenge to begin again. We may not see doves descending, or hear voices from heaven, but we, too, make our beginnings as Jesus did. We make them in the love of the Father, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.