

Homily of the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, Year A, 2026

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Psalm 29:1-4, 9-10; Acts 10:34-38; Matthew 3:13-17

Two questions frequently asked: Why do the Catholic Church baptize babies since Jesus says in Mark 16:16, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved"? Children's Baptism is both biblical and in Christian tradition. Luke 19:13-15, "Children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked them, but Jesus said, 'Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.' After he placed his hands on them, he went away." Children's Baptism is a continuation of Jesus' response towards children. Records of household Baptisms: Lydia's household (Acts 16:15), Philippian jailer and his family (Acts 16:33), and Stephana's household (1 Corinthians 1:16). "Train the young in the way they should go; even when old, they will not swerve from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Anyone who swerves when old, after receiving the way to go when young, is responsible for his or her actions.

What is the difference between John the Baptist's Baptism and Jesus' Baptism? John's Baptism was not Trinitarian. That is, it was not, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19), which is why the Catholic Church does not recognize any baptism that is not Trinitarian. John's Baptism was a call to repentance and preparation of the Messiah. Jesus' Baptism is Trinitarian, which we are celebrating its significance today.

Last Sunday was the Feast of the Epiphany (revelation) of the Lord. The revelation continues today with his Baptism. As we read in today's gospel, God himself and the Holy Spirit are the witnesses to Jesus' revelation. God makes a public declaration about Jesus, not through any prophet, not through any angel, not through the shepherds, not through the Magi, not through Simeon and Anna, not through John the Baptist, but by himself and in the presence of the Holy Spirit. The gospel says that when Jesus was baptized, "... the heavens were opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'" (Matthew 3:16-17).

Maximus of Turin explains, "Christ is baptized, not that he may be sanctified in the waters, but that he himself may sanctify the waters... For when the Savior is washed, then already for our Baptism all water is cleansed and the fount purified... Christ therefore takes the lead in Baptism, so that Christian people may follow after him with confidence."

Last Sunday, the Magi brought mystical gifts to Jesus foreshadowing his messianic mission: gold (his kingship), frankincense (his priesthood), and myrrh (his burial). In the same way, an earlier revelation of Jesus' mission was prophesied by Isaiah as in the first reading, "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased. Upon him I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations. ... [He is] a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness" (Isaiah 42:1, 6-7). As we begin the second week of the year, we pray that the light of Jesus lights our way and dispels every darkness of the past year. May we be healed from every blindness of the past year. May we be released from every confinement and dungeon of the past year. Amen. As Advent and Christmas decorations are taken down from today, let us not take down the graces of Advent and Christmas that we have received.

In the second reading, Peter speaks of Jesus' mission: "He went about doing good and healing all those possessed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). We pray that in the new year, we will experience God's goodness, healing, and deliverance in abundance. Amen.

Some people mistake Baptism as a Christian naming ceremony. Baptism is the spiritual and mystical foundation of other Sacraments and our spiritual lives. If the baptismal foundation is absent, there is nothing sacramental to build upon. If the baptismal foundation becomes weak at any stage, the spiritual building becomes weak. If baptismal promises collapse, the spiritual dwelling collapses.

Today's celebration summons us to "Three Rs," Remembering, Reflection, and Renewal:

*That our Baptism is our spiritual rebirth,
That our Baptism frees us from original sin,
That our Baptism grants us saving grace,
That our Baptism grants us sanctifying grace,
That our Baptism makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church,
That our Baptism makes us faithful followers of Christ,
That our Baptism sealed us with indelible spiritual mark,
That our Baptism makes us dwelling places of the Holy Spirit,
That by our Baptism we reject Satan, his works, and all his empty promises,
That by our Baptism we reject evil's glamor and refuse to be mastered by sin,
That the oils of our Baptism are oils of our salvation,
That the water of our Baptism is our spiritual cleansing,
That our white garment at our Baptism means our Christian dignity,
That the lighted candle at our Baptism means that we are children of light,
That the prayer over our ear at our Baptism opens our ears to hear God's word,
That the prayer over our mouth at our Baptism opens our mouth to proclaim our faith,
That our Baptism makes us beloved children of God and pleasing to him,
That our Baptism is the gateway to our eternal life.*

O Lord, bless all who nurtured us and all who still nurture us to keep alive the graces of our Baptism.
Amen.

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