

Baptism of the Lord

January 11, 2026

St. Edward's Parish

Friends, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, where Jesus is publicly revealed as the Father's

Son, brings the Christmas Season to a close and opens the beginning of Ordinary Time. On this day, it is fitting to reflect on the place baptism in God's plan of salvation and on our own baptism.

The Gospel today recalls the baptism of Jesus by John. It is important to note that John's baptism was different from the sacrament of baptism that we receive today (I will say more about this in a moment). John's baptism was merely a sign; a sign of repentance and a preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus, however, had no need of repentance. Why then does He seek John's baptism? Reflection on this Gospel has brought to light a few reasons: first, Jesus submits to John's baptism to show that He identifies Himself with sinners. Though sinless, Jesus will take upon Himself the sins of the whole world. Second, by submitting to John's baptism, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Baptism for us. Third, Jesus gave an example that we should follow in His footsteps and seek Baptism ourselves.

Following this event, we see Jesus place a strong emphasis on the need for Baptism in the Christian life. He says to Nicodemus in the Gospel of John: "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit" (Jn 3:5). And after the Resurrection, Jesus instructs His disciples "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). Ever since, the Sacrament of Baptism has been an integral part of Christian life both for adults and even infants.

A question we are sometimes asked as Catholics, especially from Christians of certain denominations, is: "Why do you baptize infants? Why not wait until children are old enough to decide for themselves?" Many of you were likely baptized as infants, and perhaps you have

considered this question as well. A few insights come together to answer this question. First, we find that the Church observed infant baptism very early on, even perhaps during the time of the Apostles. In the Acts of the Apostles, we find accounts of “whole households” receiving Baptism, which presumably include infants (e.g. Acts 16:15, CCC 1252). In addition, we see Jesus’ personal concern for children expressed in the Gospels. You likely recall the scene where people were bringing little children to Jesus, but the disciples tried to stop them. Jesus, however, insisted: “Let the little children come to me” (Mk 10:13). Finally, the foundational insight is that the Sacrament of Baptism is not merely a symbol. It is not just a blessing of a child or a welcoming into the Church. Rather, the Sacrament of Baptism, instituted by Jesus, imparts a real change in our soul, freeing us from sin, filling us with the life of God, and making us children of God.

These astounding effects of the Sacrament of Baptism are reflected in the details of Jesus’ own Baptism. Here we see three notable things: the water, the Spirit of God descending, and the voice of the Father. Let us consider the meaning of each. First the water of Baptism signifies its cleansing power. Baptism cleanses us from all sin, original sin and any actual sin we have committed by our own free choice. Original sin is not so much a sin that we committed personally by choice, but it describes the fallen state that we are born into on account of the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve. They were created by God in an intimate friendship with Him, and this gift was intended to be passed down to all of us. However, they lost that gift by their sin, and we have all suffered because of it. An analogy could be a father who had a great inheritance that should have been handed on to his children. If he wasted that inheritance, the children suffer because that gift was lost, even though it was not their fault. Baptism, even of infants, restores the gift of intimate friendship with God that had been lost. Second, the descent

of the Spirit of God, reveals that the life of God comes down into our souls in Baptism, and God begins to dwell in us in a profound way. Finally, the voice of the Father is heard saying, "This is my beloved Son." Baptism makes us beloved sons and daughters of God. It is true that all people are created in the image and likeness of God and are loved by God; however, it is only by the Sacrament of Baptism that we become truly children of God like Jesus Himself. These priceless graces of Baptism are why we bring even infants so they will not be deprived of such gifts.

I remember speaking with an elderly gentleman several years ago. He was reflecting on these graces of Baptism and asked, "If Baptism is so powerful, why is it that for so many people who are baptized it seems to make no difference in their lives?" To answer that, we need to remember that we must also cooperate with God's grace. For the graces of Baptism to develop in our lives and not be lost, we must also work with them. If someone gives you a gift for Christmas, you must also open it to make use of it. Similarly, a seed contains within it a great power, but it must be nurtured to grow. Likewise, the graces in Baptism must be nurtured by the practice of our faith, by the other sacraments (e.g. Eucharist and Confession), by creating a Catholic home, regular prayer, and the study of our faith. Without this cooperation, the grace of Baptism will not bear fruit.

As we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord let us first recall the importance of our own Baptism and give thanks for those who brought us for Baptism as infants or who helped us along the way, if we were baptized later in life. As well, knowing the great graces of Baptism, let us resolve to deepen our practice of the faith so that these graces may grow and we may become who God truly created us to be, namely, His sons and daughters.