

Dear Friends,

As we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord this weekend we also bring to a close the Christmas Season. I hope this was a beautiful celebration of the incarnation for all of you. Being here at St. Catherine of Genoa Parish for the celebration of Jesus' Birth was a spiritually enriching experience for me. I wish to express my sincere gratitude for all the cards and gifts people gave me. I am truly humbled and grateful for all the generosity that has been shown.

One question that has always challenged my understanding of Jesus' life is this: Why did he get baptized? Our celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism is nothing like what Jesus experienced in the Jordan River at the hands of John the Baptist. When John baptized, it was seen as a symbolic cleansing of sin as a response to the peoples' commitment to repent. John proclaimed a message of repentance in order to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. As the people heard his message they made the decision to reform their lives. Once the commitment was made they walked into the river, confessed their sins, and John poured water over them. So, John's baptismal ceremony was more like our Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Jesus was born without sin. So, why did he have to be baptized? We hear these words in Matthew's Gospel, *John tried to prevent him [Jesus], saying 'I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?'* So even John the Baptist was confused by what Jesus was doing.

Jesus' reason for being baptized by John was, *"to fulfill all righteousness."* How would righteousness be fulfilled? Righteousness would be fulfilled through Jesus' ministry of proclaiming the Good News of God's love, forgiving sins, healing the sick, raising the dead and, finally, through his passion, death and resurrection. So, Jesus' baptism was a preparation, a moment of initiation into his life of ministry.

When we look at Jesus' baptism in this light we can say our baptism is exactly like his. When we were baptized we were initiated into a new life as members of his body. As Catholic Christians we are to live as Jesus lived; we are to love as he has loved us. That means we continue to carry out his mission of proclaiming the Good News of God's love to the world. We are to forgive sins. We are called to be a healing presence in a world of great suffering and pain. We are to try to bring new life into the Church and the world through our faith, worship and prayer. We have been initiated into a life that includes taking up our own crosses each day of our lives. We are asked to die to ourselves, to sacrifice for the good of others, especially the poor.

As we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord we also celebrate our own baptism into his life, death and resurrection. His baptism is our baptism because we have been initiated into his life and ministry.

So, for the last time this season, I wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy new year. But, we have to remember the best is yet to come. We have been initiated into a wonderful life of great mystery and joy. I pray that the days to come will continue to enlighten all of our hearts with the promise of God's voice who speaks from the heavens, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel