

# Fact of FAITH

## The Baptism of the Lord

by Fr. Larry Rice

On January 10, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. This day marks the end of the Christmas season and the return to Ordinary Time for our liturgical cycle.

But the occurrence of Christ's Baptism is one that raises some interesting questions. The first and most obvious question is this: Why did Jesus need to be baptized? Baptism, we believe, is for the forgiveness of sins, and John said that this was the purpose of his Baptism as well. But Jesus was without sin. So, why did he need to be baptized?

Each of the Gospels handles this scene differently. In Mark's Gospel, no explanation is given. In Matthew, Jesus and John have a small dialogue, where John objects, but Jesus explains that it's necessary for him to be baptized to fulfill God's designs for righteousness. Luke slyly glosses over this scene, simply saying, "After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened . . ." In John's Gospel, the Baptism of Jesus isn't mentioned. Instead, John catches sight of Jesus walking by and announces to the crowds that Jesus is the savior.

Some commentators have speculated that Jesus' Baptism marked the dawn of his awareness of his



divinity and mission. Others have said that the encounter between Jesus and John is the point of transition between the Old Covenant and the New, between the era of the prophets and the messianic era. But for all of us who have been baptized, this event makes holy the waters of Baptism we have received. We have been baptized into a community of faith and into Christ's Death and Resurrection. Just as our Baptism marks the beginning of new life for us, Christ's Baptism marks the beginning of his earthly mission, which makes that new life possible.

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