

Baptism of the Lord, Year B
St. Mary's Southside
Isaiah 55:1-11
Response – Is 12:2-3, 4bcd, 5-6
1 John 5:1-9
Mark 1:7-11
January 11, 2009

Today we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. Did Jesus *need* to be baptized? John the Baptist preached a baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Certainly, Jesus had no sins to be forgiven.

However, Jesus' baptism was not without significance. It marked the beginning of his public ministry. Before that little is known about Jesus except the birth narratives. Baptism marked a new beginning, an inauguration of Jesus' public ministry, the beginnings of the fulfillment of his call to preach, teach, and minister to the people of God.

I think that the significance of the Rite of Baptism is overlooked. Some see it as just something we do with babies without understanding why.

Baptism is not just a simple act of pouring water over the person's head and saying a couple of prayers.

Baptism changes who we are. It does remove the stain of original sin but it is even more than that. In baptism, we follow in the footsteps of Jesus. As Jesus began his public ministry with his baptism, we enter into a new way of life.

Thus, baptism is a rite of initiation. The Lord invites us to come to his banquet to eat and drink without cost. The Lord offers us true food and true drink without *requiring* anything in return. It is a gift freely given by God to us. It is not something we could ever earn or buy on our own. It is a gift given freely and a gift of limitless value.

So do we take this gift and run and hid? We can but that doesn't show any appreciation of the gift. If we want to show our appreciation we should put what we have been given to good use.

If we want to so appreciation for the gift we should strive to live as the Lord calls. Do we always succeed? Admittedly we struggle and even fail at times but we are called to carry on the struggle.

God understands we are not perfect. Ultimately, God wants to do one thing; to love. All the commandments, all the instructions found in scripture are meant to help us understand what it means to love. The commandments are not to be a burden but a tool to guide us in serving the Lord.

Jesus ultimately shows us what it means to love in the Crucifixion but before that he taught the disciples how to live. Jesus' mission was three-fold, to be a priest, prophet, king.

A priest in offering the sacrifice of his life. A prophet in preaching and teaching God's word, and a king not in power but in service to others.

Jesus' baptism marks the beginning of the fulfillment of his vocation. In our baptism we are called to follow in his footsteps. Are we forced to? No, we have free will but God does call each of us to work for the good of all in some way. This is our vocation.

This week we celebrate National Vocations Awareness. Vocations are more than just priesthood and religious life. A vocation is how God calls us to live in service. Vocations come in

various forms; priesthood, religious life, diaconate, married life, or single life. It isn't a job. It is the way we live our lives caring for other people, working for the common good rather than for our own advancement.

To live a vocation well is to live as God calls us to; in being a good parent, a good teacher, a good nurse, or whatever else we are good at.

We can serve in church. We can be altar servers, lectors, Eucharistic ministers, musicians, or ushers. It takes many hands working together to offer beautiful worship. We need more people to do this. Do you think you could help with one or more of these ministers?

We can serve in other ways. A married couple can give witness to God's love in their own love for each other. To live in everlasting fidelity holding to the covenant they made at their wedding. Medical staff can proclaim God's love and serve in the way they care for the patients.

Teachers can serve by not teaching just material knowledge but teaching how to be a good person.

We can serve by working within the church whether we feel called to be ordained or as lay person. The point is to find out how God is calling us to serve.

Of course, I do want to take a minute to specifically speak about vocations to the priesthood, religious life, and the diaconate. It is not for everyone. It is a calling. Numbers of priests and religious are way down. Some say remaining single is too counter-cultural. Serving God, no matter what form is not about following what the culture says we should do. It is about doing what God wants us to.

Is it easy for me to never have a family of my own? No, I get lonely at times. But I do it not for my own glory but for God's glory. For me, it is part of the ministry, to say it is part of my calling to say I am willing to totally dedicate my life in service to the Lord.

Is the only way to totally dedicate our lives to the Lord to not many and all become priests and religious? No! We totally dedicate our lives to the Lord by living however God calls us.