

TRINITY NEWS

WEEK 02.
January 08, 2023

Baptism of Christ

Today the Church celebrates Jesus' Baptism, the 'commencement' of His active ministry. It comes at the end of a pretty action-packed couple of weeks in the Church calendar – to wit:

- On December 25th we have Jesus' birth, i.e. God the Son assumes His human identity, He becomes Jesus– the Word was made Flesh;
- On the 1st of January we celebrate Jesus' Circumcision i.e. He assumes His cultural identity as He is incorporated into the community of Israel.
- On the same day, He assumes His individual and personal identity when He is given the name Jesus.
- Lastly, on January 6th, this whole process is summed up, so to speak, at the Epiphany, when we celebrate "God in man made manifest". We proclaim that God is here among us, in the person of a Jew named Jesus: He has arrived.

And now today, the first Sunday after the Epiphany, we fast-forward 30-odd years to celebrate the event that marks the beginning of His earthly ministry: His baptism by John in the Jordan.

If Jesus' Baptism marks His 'initiation' into active ministry, it also marks, in a sense, the culmination of His 'formation' i.e. His graduation. The gospels tell us very little about those thirty years between His birth and the beginning of His ministry but we can be sure that they were not empty years. Jesus, if He was as human as we are, was busy, learning to talk, learning to read and write, learning the fundamentals of His religion, learning the

history of His people, learning a trade, learning how to relate to people. And now He's ready to undertake His mission. At least His Father thinks He's ready: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." You've graduated, in other words, now get on with what you were sent here to do.

For us, Baptism remains a ceremony of initiation but it has largely lost this sense of 'graduation'. In the early days of the Church of course, this was not so: you had to undergo a long period of training before you were baptized, indeed, until it was agreed that sin after baptism could be forgiven, many believers put off getting baptized until the last possible minute. However, once society itself became Christian, a Christian upbringing was assumed and infant baptism became the norm, as it is today. In all likelihood it will remain the norm for the foreseeable future. Let's consider just what that means.

It's as if, when a student entered Kindergarten, everyone - teachers, parents and administrators - made a solemn promise that they would do everything in their power to help the kid graduate, and then handed them high school diploma, shook their tiny hand and referred to them from that time forth as 'High School Graduates'.

Sounds odd, but it isn't as silly as it might seem. I believe that if teachers, parents and administrators actually lived up to the promise they made, the student would almost certainly merit the diploma at the end of the process – but it would all depend on people keeping their promises.

To page 2

From page 1

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So it is with the sacrament of Baptism. Its integrity as a sacrament in this day and age, depends on the sponsors, parents and the community keeping the promises they make, to actively support the child's Christian formation. I don't need to go into how problematic this has in fact become. To many today, baptism is a cultural event more than anything else, and sponsorship an honor one bestows upon a friend with no real thought given to the responsibilities of 'god-parenting'. Moreover, the cultural mood is against the idea of 'formation' anyway. Many argue that it is unfair to make decisions regarding values and faith for our children before they are old enough to think for themselves. Children should be allowed to develop their own beliefs without our interference. That, at least, is the current consensus - but I believe that that is quite off the mark.

Let's face it: The child is a person waiting to learn, waiting to be taught - it's not as if their ideas about the world are going to spring up out of their own 'inner' Me. They will absorb values and beliefs, if not from us, then from somewhere – we do not create our own values! Our Bishop Brent was well aware of

this: his criticism of secular education was based on the insight that in its attempt to be neutral in matters of belief and faith, what the system really creates is an unsupervised vacuum – an irresistible temptation to the many demons on the prowl looking for something to get their teeth into.

We have a duty then to see to the spiritual formation of our children. This is, of course, the special responsibility of parents and sponsors, but also of the congregation as a Christian community. Gone are the days when we could count on society at large to assist us in this task: indeed, today the input from society is, from a Christian perspective, largely negative, so it is especially important that we consciously shoulder this responsibility. And it is not only the children: we also have a duty to support each other in our common quest, in our journey in Christ. Because the journey we commence at Baptism is one that never ends and so neither does the responsibility we assume towards each other at baptism. We are always on the way, we are always in need of each other's help and guidance. This is the nature of the community we join at Baptism.

So, as we celebrate today Christ's formal inauguration of His Ministry, let us give renewed thought to our own, for we are all His ministers, and let's rededicate ourselves to the task of building up the fellowship by living up to our baptismal promises – the ones made in our name, and ones we have made in the name of others.

**COMING UP: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, JANUARY 29TH,
AFTER THE 9:30 SERVICE. PLEASE SAVE THE DATE.**

SAINTS:

William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, 10 January. William Laud was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury by his friend and ecclesiastical ally, King Charles, in 1633. The aim of both Archbishop and Monarch was to counter the reforming Puritan movement, which emphasised personal and ecclesial austerity as a means of sustaining conversion. Laud was a High Churchman who felt that the majesty of God should be reflected in the liturgy of the church and rigorously set about ensuring that its ministers should practise what he preached. His relentless approach left no room for variance of practice -- but neither did the Puritans -- and the latter had the upper hand in Parliament and eventually impeached him in 1640 and imprisoned him in the Tower of London. His friend the King did not -- or could not -- come to his assistance and he was beheaded on this day in 1645.

Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers, 13 January. Hilary was born at Poitiers in about the year 315; his family, though pagan, gave him an excellent education and he was proficient in Latin and Greek. After extensive personal study, he tells us that he was baptised at the age of thirty. He was elected bishop of the city in the year 350 and immediately became caught up in the Arian controversy, himself asserting that mortals of this world were created to practise moral virtues thus reflecting the one in whose image they are made, the eternal and creative first cause, God, and that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is of one substance with the Father. His learning and oratory led to his title of "Athanasius of the West". He was known as a gentle, kind friend to all, even though his writings seemed severe at times. He died in the year 367.