

Pastoral Reflection for the Feast of Jan 6: the Theophany of Christ in which he is baptized in the River Jordan by St John the Baptist. This is the first major event in Christ's adult life that is recorded in the Gospels and is also one of the principal Trinitarian theophanies mentioned in the Gospel. Christ's Baptism is the first of two recorded instances where the Father and the Holy Spirit are present with the Son. His Transfiguration is the second event. In both cases, he was experienced in his divinity and humanity. The depth of his humility is shown in his acceptance of being baptized by John.

Being of one throne with the Father and the Spirit, I have as my escort the legions of the Angels; yet I in My compassion, I accepted hospitality in a little cave when I was born in Bethlehem; so then John, lend your right hand to me that I may now in myself wash clean away the trespasses of the world. (*Forefeast of the Theophany, Matins*)

The Greek word for hospitality, *philoxenia*, literally means a love of strangers. A common responsibility throughout much of the ancient world was to show hospitality to strangers especially those who were vulnerable and in need. Of course, created as icons of Christ, we are not strangers to him. But through our sinfulness, we are estranged from him. In his Baptism, he enters into the waters of the River Jordan and bears upon himself the totality of human sinfulness and brokenness. As the Suffering Servant, he proceeds to his Crucifixion, Resurrection, and at Pentecost, the gift of the Church – the Body of Christ- in which through sacraments and worship, we are drawn into community with him.

Our Baptism is the mystery, or sacrament, of the Church in which we are welcomed home to begin our own journey into the kingdom of heaven. During the service for Baptism, we pray for the “grace of redemption, the blessing of Jordan” to sanctify the baptismal water through the indwelling or “descent of the Holy Spirit.” At the Great Blessing of the Waters, which takes place on the Feast of the Theophany, the Priest prays in a similar manner:

For you, O Master, for the sake of your compassion, could not endure to behold the race of humans tormented by the devil; but you came and saved us. . . . You sanctified the streams of the Jordan, sending down from heaven your Holy Spirit, crushing the heads of the dragons that lurked therein. . . . Do you yourself, O King, the Lover of Mankind, come now through the descent of your Holy Spirit, and sanctify this water.

When we are baptized, we are not saved in some final sense but we are graced with the Holy Spirit to begin the process of our salvation (our deification) in which we, through the Holy Spirit, become fully united with Christ and the Trinity. In Colossians 3:1-14, the Apostle Paul shows us that this means that we are to live like Christ

If then you were raised with Christ . . . set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God (vv. 1-3) . . . since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of him who created him (vv. 9-10). . . . Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and beloved, put one tender compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another. If anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all of them put on love (*agapē*), which is the bond of perfection (vv. 12-14).

(Fr John D. Jones, Priest-in-Charge, Holy Theophany Church— A Mission of the OCA)