

First Reading: Isaiah 42:1-4,6-7
 Response: **"I will bless his people with peace"** (Ps. 28:11)
 Second Reading: Psalm 28:1-4, 9-10
 Second Reading: Acts 10:34-38
 Gospel: Matthew 3:13-17

The early Church always had a deep sense of the Presence of God (*Shekinah*). They proclaimed the Risen Lord in their midst (*Kerygma*). Christmas is celebration of his incarnation.

The **Baptism of Our Lord** is an epiphany, revealing Jesus. The *Qol Yahweh*, קוֹל יְהוָה, **"Voice of God", full of power** (Ps. 28:4), **"resounding over the waters,"** heard at Jordan, reveals to the world that Jesus is Lord, God's beloved Son.

This was prophetically proclaimed in *Isaiah 42:1*: **"My chosen one in whom my soul delights,"** and **"I have endowed him with my Spirit"** (Is. 42:1).

St. Peter proclaims this fulfilment in Acts: **"God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power"** (10:37).

The gospel today describes the epiphany: **"the heavens opened,"** and **"the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him,"** and **"a voice from heaven"** (Mt.3:16).

The baptism of Jesus is full of meaning, mystery and implication. It is indicative of Christ's life, death and resurrection; from eternity to incarnation, from *kenosis* to *apotheosis*, having died to being glorified. It is a rite of passage, inaugurating the public life of Jesus.

Still, one wonders why Jesus is baptised by John, who says **"it is I who needs baptism from you"** (Mt.3:14). Why would the judge submit to judgement, baptism of repentance from John?

It is to show how important it is for the Son of God to identify with our fallen humanity. **"It is fitting to do all that righteousness demands"** (Mt.3:15). It is so, explains Jean-Pierre Batut, that however low God looks into the depths of human misery, his glance will rest only upon his own Son (*Communio* 32, Spring 2005, pg. 11).

Who knows how low God will bend to save us? Baptism itself is a *Kerygma*, proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ, bringing new life for all. **"The Lord will bless his people with peace"** (Ps.28:11). Such is the Good News, the living Tradition of our faith!

Study the text describing the Baptism of the Lord (Mk. 1: 7-11).

Scripture

Reflect on the Christian Rite of Baptism.

Liturgy

Discuss the Church's practice and teaching on Baptism.

Teaching

What is your commitment and mission from your baptism?

Witness

FOR THE CHILDREN

Read and discuss the scene of the 'Baptism of our Lord.' (Today's Gospel)

What is seen in the Christian Rite of Baptism? (visible reality). *Outward signs of sacrament.*

What actually occurs in Baptism, divine action (invisible reality). *Inward grace of Sacrament.*

Decide on what commitment follows Baptism. (*Discipleship and Mission*)

FOR TEENAGERS (Shared Christian Praxis)

What is your understanding of baptism?

What does your baptism mean to you?

What is the Church's teaching on baptism? (Teacher's input)

What connections are there between you and the Church?

How do you see your mission and the Church in the building the Kingdom?

RCIA

In celebrating the Sacrament of Baptism one enters the Christ experience of heaven opening, the Holy Spirit coming down, and God says: This is my beloved. In other words, the baptized become one with Christ as child of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and have the right to heaven.

LIFE EXPERIENCE

I am told that St. Louis IX, king of France (1226-1270), saw the celebration of the anniversary of his baptism as more important than his birthday. Baptism spelt his being born to eternal life.

LITTLE ANGELINA

Even though she has the looks of her mother, Angelina enjoys being called 'Daddy's girl.' Her experience of her parents is a good grounding for relationships with her Father in heaven. She will learn that heaven has opened for her. She received the Holy Spirit. And God is saying "You are my child." She is Big Daddy's girl. The truths of faith are the truths of life.

IMPORTANT WORD: Baptism

Greek:	Βαπτισμα	Baptism
Hebrew:	ט ה ל י ב ט	Tebilah (immersion, purification)
Latin:	Baptismum	Washing, immersion, cleansing

Baptism comes from an old custom of cleansing. The Baptist used it specifically as a penitential rite in anticipation of something greater, viz. **Sacrament of Baptism** (new life).

Watchword: "**This is my Son, the beloved**" (Matt.3:17)

- Hebrew: ז ה ב נ י י ד י ד י Zeh beni yididi.
- Greek: ΟΥΤΟΣ ΕΣΤΙΝ Ο ΥΙΟΣ ΜΟΥ Ο ΑΓΑΠΗΤΟΣ. Houtos estin ho huios mou ho agapetos.
- Latin: Hic est filius dilectus.
- Portuguese: Este e o meu Filho amado.
- Spanish: Este es mi Hijo amado.
- French: Celui-ci est mon Fils.
- German: Dies ist mein lieber Sohn.
- Afrikaans: Dit is my geliefde Seun.
- Zulu: Lo uyiNdodana yami thandekayo.
- Xhosa: Lo nguNyana wam endimthandayo.
- Sotho: Enwa ke Mora wa ka eo ke mo ratang.
- Irish: Is e seo mo Mhac muirneach dar thug me gnaoi.

CATECHETICS

Lesson 6: Witness and Catechesis

The Church also gives witness to its faith through its way of life, its manner of worship, and the service it renders. The lives of heroic Christians, the saints of past and present, show how people are transformed when they come to know Jesus Christ and the Spirit. The forgiveness and reconciliation experienced by repentant sinners are signs of the Church as a healing community. Concern for the poor, disadvantaged, helpless and hopeless are signs that the Church is a servant. Uniting in love, people from every corner of the earth, every racial and ethnic background, all socio-economic strata, the Church is a sign of our union with God and one another effected in Jesus Christ. Every Christian community, characterized by its stewardship, is meant to be a sign of that assembly of believers which will reach fulfilment in the heavenly kingdom. Such a community catechizes its members by its very life and work, giving witness in a multitude of ways to God's love as revealed and communicated to us in Christ.

(National Catechetical Directory of the United States. USCC, 1977, 45). Edited.

The word 'Witness' means 'testimony.' It is one who testifies for Christ and the Christian faith. It is a literal rendering of the Greek word *MARTYR*, meaning one who gives witness. Later, martyrdom referred more specifically to those who give witness with their blood.

While Christ himself "**came into the world to bear witness to the truth**" (*Jn. 18:37*) and this is sealed by the Spirit of the Lord, this same Holy Spirit is given to us to give witness to Christ (*Jn. 15:26,27*). The apostles are seen as the first witnesses of Jesus, testifying to the life and teachings of Jesus because they had seen and heard him (*Acts 1:8*). In fact the early Church lived as a witnessing community in their faithfulness to the apostolic teachings, liturgy and prayer (*Acts 2:42*), even to the point of being true martyrs for the Word of God (*Rev.6:9*).

Witness and **Christian living**, as a pillar of catechesis, shows that the Church's Tradition is also rooted in a faith that is a challenge to commitment, a **way of life**, a call to holiness. It is a discipleship to be lived to the fullest. St. Paul invites us to "**present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God**" (*Rom.12:1*). Ultimately this faith is lived in service of God and of neighbour, the living out of the new commandment of **love**. We honour the saints who exemplify this heroic virtue and challenge us to follow the Way.

Jesus came two thousand years ago not simply for a specific time, place and people. He came to **bear witness** to the love of God for everybody, everywhere and in all times. He does this through his Church to whom he gave all his power and on whom he breathed his Spirit (*Jn 20:22*). Christ is alive. His Body lives on as a community serving God and humanity. As such is the Church a **sacrament**, a sign of Christ in the world today loving and serving his people. So the Church as a whole and every Christian, is **empowered** by the Holy Spirit to bring Christ into the world. In other words to meet a Christian is to meet Christ (*Acts 9:5*).

Catechetically speaking, the Christian is a living sign of the presence of **Christ in the world**. One should see in the face of a Christian the face of Christ, in the hands of a Christian, holy hands that don't put people down but pick them up, in the heart of a Christian a heart that is caring, daring and sharing. It cares because there is love and concern for others. It dares because it commits itself and not afraid to die for Christ like Christ died for us. It shares in the being ready to give and serve like it was in the early Church (*Acts 2:44*). Such a person is an **alter Christus**, a true **Witness** of Christ to the world.

PILLARS OF CATECHESIS

SCRIPTURE	LITURGY	DOCTRINE	WITNESS
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N.B.: Witness is "where the heart is on fire with the flame of God" (*St. John Chrysostom*), where one says in all truth, "**it is no longer I who live but Christ living in me**" (*Gal.2:20*).