

The Baptism of the Lord 12 January 2025
Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“You are my beloved Son; with whom I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22)

This week I am looking forward to celebrating the Baptism of a baby, the son of an Altar Server at my former parish. I will be visiting the home of the baby to take the parents through the ceremony: little does the child know how much he is treasured, and how his parents are initiating him into another family, that he is becoming a child of God and one with the great Church family that claims a special relationship to Jesus, Son of God.

When I was parish priest, my ambition was to create a new baptistery, a more beautiful location for the existing Baptismal Font; one that would reflect better the meaning of this wondrous Sacrament. It isn't always easy to highlight the greater understanding and appreciation we have of this Sacrament following the renewal of the Liturgy at the Second Vatican Council. You will see the Baptismal Font is often placed near the door of the Church, which of course is correct because this Sacrament is about entry into the life of Christ and becoming a Child of God. However, some locations do not reflect the greater participation of all present in the Sacrament that is a hallmark of the Liturgical Renewal at the Council.

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord this coming weekend affords us an opportunity to reflect further on the meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism and so give thanks for the Day of our own Baptism. Father Ferlita reminds us in his commentary on the Feast that in the early Church the Epiphany, which we celebrated last Sunday in the UK was an all inclusive Feast that “celebrated the showing forth” of God, the manifestation of God to the world in the human form of Jesus Christ. It included the celebration of Jesus with the adoration of the Magi, and the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. Eventually these events were celebrated separately, all but one of them (The Presentation) celebrated in the time we now call the Christmas Season. Indeed, in my present ministry (co-ordinator of Ethnic Chaplaincies) I was happy to be present on 6th January (the Epiphany) with the Eritrean Community Birmingham who celebrate Christmas according to the Eastern Alexandrian Rite; it was beautiful celebration and full of life! In the West Christ's Baptism never really found a place liturgically, not until Vatican II, when it was restored to the Western Church and set for the First Sunday after Epiphany; that is this coming Sunday. The Lord's Baptism, even though celebrated separately, is still a celebration of the showing forth of God, of the manifestation of God to the world in the human form of Jesus Christ. This is made explicit in the Gospel of St Luke: a voice from heaven is heard to say “*you are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.*” (Luke 3:22)

There are many different dimensions to Baptism of adults and children, which can be commented on over a period of time. Personally, I hope there will be a “Year of Baptism” at

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some time as there has been a “Year of Faith”, and we have a “Year of Hope” underway in the Jubilee. That would give us the opportunity to extend catechesis on Baptism in the Sunday Homily over that period of time. One change I have seen over the years in relation to Baptism of children is how much it has become a wider celebration for family and friends. In a way this is the day when the parents proclaim: “This is my son/daughter in whom we are well pleased!” However, the celebration for the Church is much more than the family inviting everyone to rejoice at the human birth of the child, wonderful as it is! To each of us in Baptism the Holy Spirit comes making us children of God. It is the basic sacrament of “rebirth”. Washed with water and consecrated by the Holy Spirit, the baptised begin a new life in Christ who died and is risen. St Paul in Romans 6 says that through Baptism we “*walk in newness of life*”. Over each of us the Father said “*You are my beloved child; with you I am well pleased!*”

When I visit the family of the child to be baptised I will be speaking of the white baptism shawl that’s placed over the shoulders of the child to signify the new life in Christ given by the Holy Spirit, and the Anointing with Holy Oils by which he is chosen for a special mission in life.

In the Gospel of St Luke from which we read of Our Lord’s Baptism we hear that “*Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature with God and man*” (Luke 2:52). Ferlita asks “*Have we? I hope we have, I hope we do, because our Baptism, too, is meant to be a ‘showing forth’ of God to the world.*”

The Jubilee Year we are just beginning is a special time to reflect on our Baptismal calling; to thank God for all we have received in this Sacrament and to commit ourselves to living it out in our lives in the power of the Holy Eucharist.

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