

As we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, we transition from the Christmas season into Ordinary Time. Yet, the central mystery of Christmas—that God became man in the person of Jesus Christ—continues to shine through today’s liturgy. Some argue that Jesus’ divinity was not inherent but "adopted" at His baptism. This claim, however, is contrary to both Sacred Scripture and the consistent teaching of the Church, as illumined by the Fathers.

The Baptism of Jesus and His Divinity

In the Gospel (Luke 3:15-16, 21-22), we witness the theophany at Jesus’ baptism: the heavens open, the Holy Spirit descends in bodily form like a dove, and the Father’s voice declares, *“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”* Far from suggesting adoption, this event reveals the eternal relationship within the Holy Trinity.

The declaration of the Father is not a new reality for Jesus but a public manifestation of His divine Sonship, eternally begotten of the Father. As Isaiah prophesied (Isaiah 42:1), the Servant is the chosen one in whom God delights—a prefiguration fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Acts 10:38 further confirms that Jesus’ baptism was not about adoption but the anointing of His human nature for His public ministry, through which He reveals God’s Kingdom.

The Testimony of the Church Fathers

The Fathers of the Church provide a robust defense of Christ’s divinity and the significance of His baptism:

1. **St. Athanasius** emphasized that Jesus, being eternally begotten of the Father, did not become divine at baptism. Instead, His baptism inaugurated His mission as the God-man to sanctify the waters for our redemption.
2. **St. Gregory Nazianzen** taught, “He comes to bury sinful humanity in the waters. He comes to sanctify the Jordan for our sake and in our place, to prepare us for the Spirit.” Jesus’ baptism does not mark a change in His nature but a revelation of His mission to save humanity.
3. **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** explained that the descent of the Spirit was a sign not of Jesus’ adoption but of the divine presence now communicated to humanity.

These Fathers unanimously affirm that Jesus is God incarnate. His baptism, therefore, is not a moment of adoption but a Trinitarian epiphany revealing His divine identity and mission.

The Link to the Christmas Mystery

The Baptism of the Lord continues the Christmas theme of God dwelling among us. At Christmas, we celebrate Emmanuel—God with us—in the humility of the manger. At His baptism, we see the God-man entering the waters of the Jordan to redeem humanity and restore creation. Both events manifest God’s loving condescension: in the Incarnation, He took on our flesh; in baptism, He entered the waters of repentance, though sinless, to identify with sinners and fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15).

Baptism and Our Salvation

Through His baptism, Christ sanctified the waters, instituting the sacrament that becomes the gateway to salvation. In baptism, we die to sin and are reborn in Christ, becoming children of God and temples of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul teaches, *“We were buried with Him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too might walk in newness of life”* (Romans 6:4).

The baptismal waters prefigure the liberation of the Israelites through the Red Sea (Exodus 14) and the cleansing flood of Noah (Genesis 7), both fulfilled in Christ. Through baptism, we are washed of original sin, incorporated into the Church, and called to participate in the divine life—a reality made possible because Jesus is truly God.

How the Baptism of the Lord Affects Our Lives

The Baptism of the Lord reminds us of our identity and mission:

1. **Renewal of Baptismal Promises:** We are called to live as beloved children of God, rejecting sin and embracing holiness.
2. **Union with Christ:** As Christ united Himself to us in baptism, we are united to Him in His death and resurrection. This unity compels us to conform our lives to His example of humility, love, and service.
3. **Empowerment for Mission:** Just as the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus for His mission, our baptism equips us to share in the Church’s mission to bring the light of Christ to the world (Isaiah 42:6-7).

Conclusion

The Baptism of the Lord is not a moment of adoption but a profound revelation of Christ’s divinity and mission. It invites us to reflect on the gift of our own baptism, through which we are united with God and drawn into His saving work. As we enter Ordinary Time, let us live as people marked by the Spirit, proclaiming Christ by our words and deeds, and preparing the way for others to encounter the God who became man for our salvation.