

Baptized In The Spirit

Introduction

I know the stores already have Valentine's Day decorations, cards and candy out...but Christmas ain't quite over! In our tradition, we don't just celebrate the little baby being born; we celebrate Christmas for a whole WEEK, and then we keep going through Epiphany, and we celebrate THAT for a whole week! It isn't until the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord that we turn all this Christmas stuff off, and pack it away until next year.

The reason the retailers (and most of your neighbors, I bet) don't keep going with the Christmas faldral is mostly that they don't "get" Christmas as we celebrate it. Think back: what were we doing during Advent? We were *waiting*. For...what? For *who*? We were waiting for the *Savior*, the One whose birth we celebrated on Christmas Day; the One whose revelation to the Magi we celebrated last week on Epiphany; the One whose public ministry began with His Baptism by John in the River Jordan!

And so we have kept celebrating Christmas all this time.

And now, as we are ready to start Ordinary Time for several weeks, maybe we should pause...and think: So *what*, that this Jesus came? What are *we* supposed to do?

Move I

In the first reading for today, we return to an Advent theme: “In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!” Isaiah, here, was calling the people of Israel to announce that the LORD is coming, and that salvation is at hand for God’s people! In the Gospel, St. Luke tells us what John the Baptist said about who *he* was: “I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

And the second reading puts a *bow* on it all:

“When the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared... he *saved* us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.”

“So that we might be *justified*...and become *heirs* in hope of eternal life.”

That’s *why* Jesus came, and died. That’s *why* He was sent! And *that’s* what all this Christmas season is about!

Move II

I don't think we *consider* this enough, brothers and sisters. Think about how quickly the culture wants us to move along past Christmas. They will acknowledge it's a special time, still...but don't drag it out. If your Christmas lights are still up, and *on*, they think that you're lazy (because their stuff has been packed up since the 27th!).

But, as I said before, this Christmas thing isn't *just* about a baby being born, as important as that event was. It was *also* important because He came for *all humanity*; Epiphany celebrates the *Gentiles* coming to worship Him. *And* it was important because we start to understand, at the *very beginning of His ministry*, that Jesus was *more* than just a Man: the Holy Spirit descended like a dove, and God *spoke*, saying, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

We celebrate today that *last* revelation of who Jesus is. When He was baptized, Jesus introduced the *sacrament* of Baptism as a way of cleansing us from original sin. And when God spoke, declaring that Jesus is His beloved son... there's a message for *us* there, too! Because when *we* were baptized, brothers and sisters...we became *part of* the Body of Christ!

And *that*...makes *us* beloved, *too*!

Move III

Here's a question, though:

Are there ways we could each live *more* as if we were God's beloved, as if we were members of the body of Christ?

The short answer is, "Absolutely!" But that isn't because we are evil people, or because we just don't care. Our presence here this *morning* shows that we care.

But the Christian life, the life of faith in the One who was *sent by God* to *save* us...it requires a *change*, y'all! John told his disciples that Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Spirit...and with *fire*. So, a good *question* to ask ourselves is this: are *we* on *fire*?

How can we tell? Fair question. I am not saying we should all be out on the street corners preaching from a soapbox (we *could*; if you are interested, there's a ministry for that). But that's not the *only* way we could respond to the grace we've received.

God, ultimately, wants us to *change*, in response to what He's done. Think about Elizabeth and John, from the Visitation. When Mary spoke her greeting to Elizabeth, John *leaped in Elizabeth's womb*. And Elizabeth was *filled with the Holy Spirit*. Their lives were *changed*.

And *ours* can be *too*.

Conclusion

The Feast of the Baptism celebrates that day when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove, and God spoke to state that Jesus is His “...beloved Son; with [whom He is] well pleased.” God spoke these words to Jesus...but He’s speaking these words to *us*, too.

How do we know He loves us? Because He sent Jesus, “...so that we might be *justified*...and become *heirs* in hope of eternal life.” That’s *why* Jesus came, and *died*. Because, even though we were created for union with God, our first parents’ *sin* separated us from Him. And we only need *respond* to the grace that’s offered to us, by repenting our sin, believing in Christ, and *living like members of Christ’s body*.

How can we do that better? In this new year, add a habit. Pick up the Sunday readings during the week... and *study* them. Commit to receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation more often, to acknowledge that we *want* God’s grace to change us. Approach the altar for Communion...and *pause* to *thank* Him after receiving Him. It almost doesn’t matter *how* we respond. What matters...is *that* we respond.

We’ve been celebrating Jesus coming to us during this Christmas season. He *has* come into our lives: born into flesh; worshiped by the Magi; and anointed by the Holy Spirit. So, now ... what *are* we gonna do?