



# The Holy See

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## FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

### *HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II*

*Sunday, 11 January 1998*

1. *"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased"* (Lk 3:22).

With these words, repeated in today's liturgy, the Father shows his Son to men and reveals his mission as one consecrated to God, as the Messiah.

At Christmas we contemplated with wonder and interior joy the *appearance* of "the grace of God ... for the salvation of all men" (Ti 2:11), a grace that took the physical features of the Child Jesus, the Son of God born as man of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. And then we discovered the first *manifestations* of Christ, "the true light that enlightens every man" (Jn 1:9), which first shone for the shepherds on the holy night and then for the Magi, the first of the peoples called to faith, who set out by the light of the star that they had seen in the sky and who came to Bethlehem to adore the newborn Child (cf. Mt 2:2).

At the Jordan, together with the manifestation of Jesus we also see the first *manifestation* of the Trinitarian nature of God: Jesus, indicated by the Father as his beloved Son, and the Holy Spirit who descends and remains over him.

2. Dear brothers and sisters, today I again have the joy of welcoming some infants to administer the sacrament of Baptism to them. This year there are *10 boys and nine girls*, who come from Italy, Brazil, Mexico and Poland.

To you, dear parents and godparents, I extend a cordial greeting and warm congratulations. You know how this sacrament, instituted by the risen Christ (cf. Mt 28:18-19), is the first sacrament of Christian initiation and serves as the entrance way to the life of the Spirit. In it the baptized person is consecrated to the Father in the Holy Spirit, in the image of Christ, the new Man, and made a member of the Church, his Mystical Body.

Baptism is called the "*washing* of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit" (Ti 3:5), the birth by water and the Spirit without which no one "can enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5). It is also called *enlightenment*, because those who receive

it "are enlightened in their minds" (St Justin, *Apology*, I, 61:12: PG 6:344).

According to St Gregory Nazianzen, "Baptism is the most beautiful and marvellous of the gifts of God.... We call it ... *gift*, because it is given to those who do not bring anything; *grace*, because it is bestowed even on the guilty; baptism, because sin is buried in the water; *anointing*, because it is sacred and royal (as are those who are anointed); *enlightenment*, because it is radiant light; *garment*, because it covers our shame; *bath*, because it washes us; *seal*, because it preserves us and is a sign of the lordship of God" (*Orations* 40:3-4; PG 36:361C).

3. I look with pleasure on these children on whom the sacrament of Baptism will be conferred today, here in the Sistine Chapel. Their membership in the Christian communities of various countries highlights the universality of the call to the faith.

They are, as St Augustine says, "the Church's offspring: grace of the Father, fruitfulness of the Mother, devout shoot, new swarm, flower of our heart ... my joy and my crown" (*Orations* VIII: 1, 4; PL 46:838).

Today's celebration invites us all to reflect on the commitments made at *Baptism*, to renew our decision to keep the flame of faith always alive, in order to become more and more the Father's beloved children.

It is especially you, dear *parents*, whom I am addressing: with the support of the Christian community and with the help of the godparents, you will educate these children of yours in the faith and you will guide them on their way to the fullness of Christian maturity. May you always be assisted in this great mission by the Holy Family of Nazareth.

4. We call upon the *Holy Spirit*, to whom this second year of preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000 is dedicated. As he descended on Jesus near the Jordan River, so may he rest today upon each of these children and lead them, with his light and strength, to relive the stages of Christ's life.

We entrust these infants and their families to Mary, the Sanctuary of the Holy Spirit. May they be able to hear and follow the Word of the Lord; nourished by the Eucharistic Bread, may they learn to love God and their neighbour as the divine Master has taught us and thus become heirs to the kingdom of heaven.

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