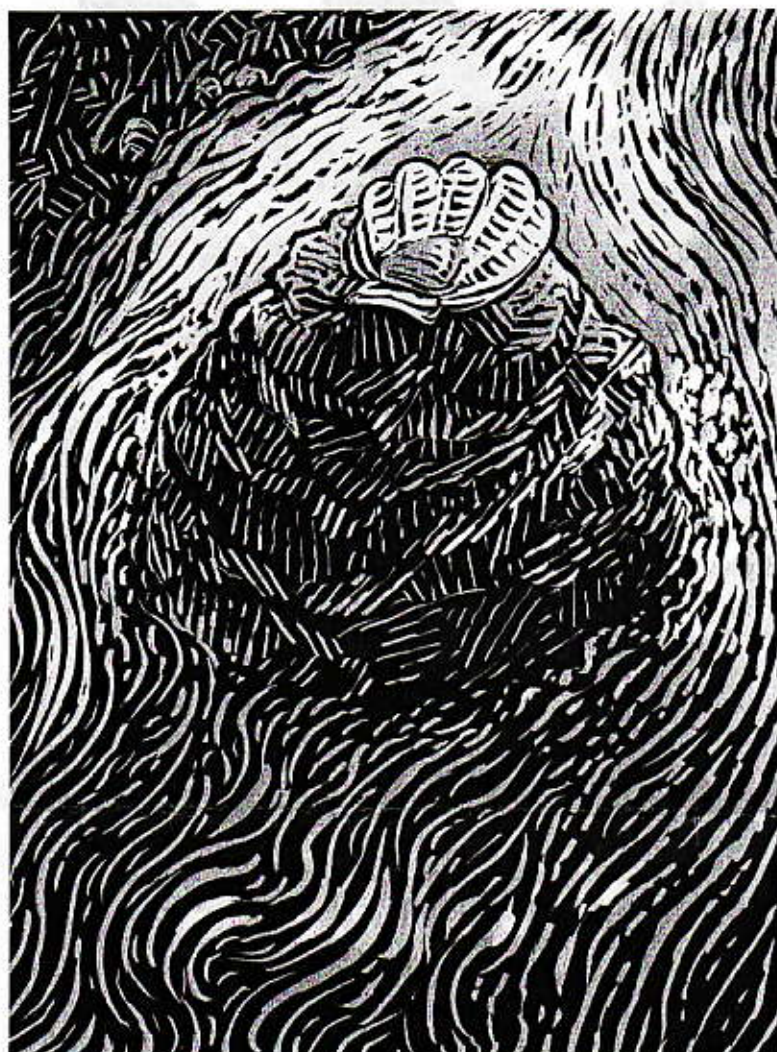


Feast of the Baptism of the Lord



Prayer for Deepening Our Baptism

O Lord,
at the baptism of your Son,
you opened up the heavens
and called him, "Beloved,"
pouring out the love of a Father's heart.

Lord, open our hearts
to the grace of our Baptism.
Let us catch a glimpse of your glory
and hear your voice tell us
that we are your beloved children, too,
and that Jesus is our brother.

Just as Jesus lived his life in obedience
to you,
so let us live our lives following your call
and his example.
Let us love you and one another
without ceasing,
because you have first loved us.
We ask this through the same Christ our
Lord. Amen.

January 10, 2010 Revealing the Beloved Son

In Luke's account of Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:15–16, 21–22), Jesus simply appears as one of the crowd who was given "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3). Only after the baptism, while Jesus is in prayer, does the Spirit appear as a dove and the voice of God sound out from the sky.

Many people ask why Jesus came for baptism, since he was without sin. Ritual cleansing was a regular part of Jewish practice before the Sabbath, after periods of uncleanness, and in preparation for great battles. John's baptism was a specific call to turn away from wrongdoing and turn toward God. So persuasive was his preaching that many of

his followers wondered if he was the Messiah. He quickly corrects that idea. As we hear today, his is a baptism of water only. The Anointed One will baptize with the Spirit and fire—a sign of God's judgment for all. When he is baptized by John, Jesus acknowledges John's authority as a man of God, and also Jesus participates in a public sign of his absolute obedience and reliance on God. For Luke, Jesus is the last person to be baptized by John, the culmination of John's ministry. The words that are heard from the heavens are similar to Isaiah 42:1 ("my servant . . . my chosen . . . in whom my soul delights"), and they express Luke's understanding that this is the beginning of the messianic era.

Looking Ahead to Ordinary Time



The Season of Ordinary Time

The Baptism of the Lord marks the end of the Christmas season. Now we begin our journey into Ordinary Time, so named because the weeks are numbered—second week, third week, and so forth. (The word *ordinary* comes from *ordinal*, which means “numbered.”) Two periods of Ordinary Time mark the Roman calendar for a total of 33 or 34 weeks: from the Monday following the Sunday after January 6 through the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, and from the Monday following Pentecost until just before the First Sunday of Advent.

Ordinary Time is distinct from the high seasons in which particular aspects of the mystery of Christ are celebrated. In Ordinary Time we celebrate and reflect on the mystery of God and life in Christ in its entirety.

On certain Sundays of Ordinary Time we celebrate some of the great mysteries of the faith: The solemnities of the Most Holy Trinity, of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (following Pentecost), and of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King (the last week of the year). During each week of Ordinary Time we are drawn into prophecies, letters, and stories about Jesus, all of which reveal layer after layer of our relationship with God.

Scripture during Ordinary Time, Winter

The first few weeks of Ordinary Time this year give us a chance to hear the opening chapters of the Gospel according to Mark during the week, even while we continue with the Gospel according to Luke on Sunday. Mark’s spare writing style introduces us to Jesus’ adult life and ministry almost immediately, and with a speed we don’t see in the other Gospel accounts. In the first five chapters, Mark records the stories of Jesus’ baptism, the temptation in the desert, the call of the first apostles, nine healings, several parables, and

the calming of the sea. The contrast between Luke’s fluid storytelling and Mark’s short and choppy sentences is sharp. When Mark does slow down to tell a story (listen for the one on Friday, January 15, or Monday, February 1, for example), he wants his hearers to pay special attention.

Memorials and Other Observances during Ordinary Time, Winter

From January 18 to 25 we will observe the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, joining with our Protestant brothers and sisters to pray that we “may all be one” (John 17:21). We will celebrate the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, which traditionally marks the end of Week of Prayer for Christian Unity on January 25, and the memorial of Saint Thomas Aquinas on January 28.

The feast of the Presentation of the Lord on February 2 used to be called “The Purification of Mary,” and for a time was considered to mark the end of the Christmas season. All over the country, throats will be blessed on the memorial of Saint Blase, February 3, a wonderful Catholic tradition. On February 6, we honor Saint Paul Miki from Japan and the 25 others who were martyred for the faith in the sixteenth century. They were the first martyrs of the Far East to be canonized. One Mexican in their group, Philip of Jesus, was the first martyr of the Americas to be named a saint.

Back-to-back memorials on February 10 and 11 celebrate Saint Scholastica, the sister of Saint Benedict, and Our Lady of Lourdes, whose appearance to Bernadette Soubirous in France inspires pilgrimages by millions of visitors each year. Many other saints are memorialized in these few weeks as well.

This year Ash Wednesday will fall on February 16, taking us into Lent and our journey to Easter.

