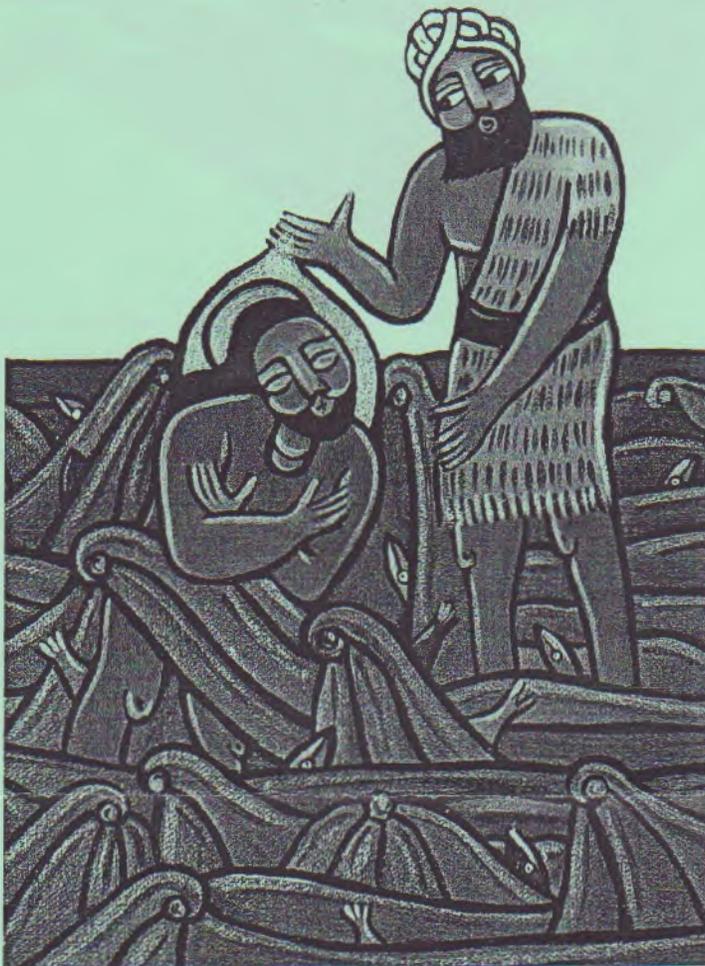


Feast of the Baptism of the Lord



Praising Water

God our Father,
on this feast of Jesus' baptism,
we thank you for water,
for how it shines in seas,
a silver ribbon in rivers,
mirroring the sky in lakes.
We thank you for making it
to quench our thirst,
for the comfort of hot baths,
and for clean, fresh laundry.
We remember today
our own Baptism,
when we were washed
in your grace, in a new way of seeing,
and in the friendship of your family.
Help us honor this calling
and remain true to you.
We ask this through the same Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, January 9, 2011 Beloved Child

Today's Readings: Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Acts 10:34-38; Matthew 3:13-17. Scholars say that the dramatic elements in today's Gospel story—the sky opening, the voice of God, the descent of the dove—are common to spiritual experiences in many religious traditions. What does this story tell us about the unique role of Jesus, our Lord and Savior?

Even in more ordinary circumstances, Jesus remained attuned to the source of that experience: God his Father. Whether he was engaged in hot debate, confronting hideous disease, or teaching in the marketplace, Jesus didn't forget that voice, that spectacular affirmation. He acted always as God's beloved child. Furthermore, he saw everyone else through that same lens—no matter how cantankerous, sick, or foolish they were.

Do we? When doing dishes or driving, do we remember we are precious? When confronting a crisis, do we carry

into it the same qualities that have gotten us this far: our courage, strength, or skill? When we're angry, mistaken, rejected, exhausted, ill, betrayed, depressed, unemployed, or told we're worthless, does that sense of affirmation rise up within?

What God said to Jesus, God says to us: "you are my beloved child. I am pleased with you." That should matter more than all the applause or awards in the world. In turn, we should hear that same description of everyone we meet. Baptism was a pivotal point for Jesus: he emerged from it energized and inspired for his public ministry. Even in the long desert days, he must have heard the echoes of that voice. When we're tempted to focus on the criticisms, we could turn instead with joy to that life-giving affirmation.



This Week and Looking Ahead to Ordinary Time

Monday, January 10 Remembering Baptism

Take time to savor yesterday's feast. At a family meal, place a bowl of water on the table, and tell the story of each person's Baptism. Then invite everyone to pass the water around, signing themselves or each other with the cross. Discuss what this sign means: We belong to Christ forever. We are signed in water with the seal of our faith, marked for his service. Today's Readings: Hebrews 1:1-6; Mark 1: 14-20.

The Season of Ordinary Time

Christmas season ends with the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, and we enter Ordinary Time. The word *ordinary* comes from *ordinal*, which means numbered. In Ordinary Time, the weeks are numbered: second week, third week, and so forth. Ordinary Time runs 34 weeks in all, during two different periods: from Monday, January 10, through Tuesday, March 8 (before Ash Wednesday), and then from Monday following Pentecost until just before the First Sunday of Advent, next November 27. During Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter we celebrate special aspects of the mystery of Christ. In Ordinary Time we 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 Sunday of the year). During each week of Ordinary Time we are drawn into prophecies, letters, and stories about Jesus, which reveal the many layers of our relationship with God.

Ordinary Time, Winter: Special Days Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

From January 18 to 25 we will join with our Protestant brothers and sisters to pray that we "may all be one" (John 17:21).

The feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul marks the end of this observance on January 25.

The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

On February 2 we hear the beautiful story of Mary and Joseph presenting their newborn son in the temple. There they meet two wise old people, Simeon and Anna, who are guided by the Holy Spirit to recognize that the child Jesus is "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:32). Because of this emphasis on Christ as "a light for revelation," people have traditionally brought candles to church to be blessed on this day and then used them in their homes during the year. For this reason, the day was once called "Candlemas."

Blessing of Throats, Optional Memorial of Saint Blase

On February 3, in many churches, throats will be blessed as we remember this early Christian martyr (d. 316), said to have cured a boy with a fish bone caught in his throat.

Nourishing Family Faith

In spite of busy family schedules, try to gather for dinner together as often as you can manage. Open and close with prayer, blessing not only the food, but the stories of each person's day. You might try this Tuscan minestrone soup:

1 15 oz. can white kidney beans, 1 Tbsp. olive oil, ½ cup chopped onion, ½ cup chopped carrots, ½ cup chopped celery, 1 clove minced garlic, 8 cups chicken or vegetable broth, 1 sprig of rosemary, 1 cup peeled and diced potatoes, 2-3 sliced zucchini (about 3 cups), 1 large chopped tomato (about 1 cup), a sprinkling of basil.

In a large pot, sauté onions, carrots, and celery in the oil until tender. Stir in garlic; 30 seconds later add broth, drained beans, and rosemary. Bring the soup to a boil, then reduce to a simmer for 45 minutes. Stir in the potatoes; cook 15 minutes more. Add zucchini and tomato; cover and simmer 10 more minutes. Season to taste with salt, pepper, and basil.

