

BAPTISM OF THE LORD (Mt 3, 13-17)

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee, to John at the Jordan, in order to be baptized by him. **14** But John refused him, saying, "I ought to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?" **15** And responding, Jesus said to him: "Permit this for now. For in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all justice." Then he allowed him. **16** And Jesus, having been baptized, ascended from the water immediately, and behold, the heavens were opened to him. And he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him. **17** And behold, there was a voice from heaven, saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

From the very beginnings of Christianity, the event of the Lord's baptism was difficult for believers to understand and gave rise to heretical teachings within the Church. For example, the Ebionites claimed that Jesus was a sinful man like all of us until his baptism, and that it was only the Holy Spirit, who descended upon him in the waters of the Jordan, that brought about a transformation in his being. The erroneous teachings of the Ebionites were rejected by the councils of the Church in the early centuries of Christianity.

Jesus, who stands in line with sinners, expresses his solidarity with humanity. Sin entered the world because man wanted to be like God. And salvation comes when God becomes man. In the waters of the Jordan, Jesus immerses himself in human sin. Man leaves purified, Jesus burdened with the sin of humanity. This is also expressed in his name Yeshua – God is salvation.

All this takes place on the banks of the Jordan River, which formed the boundary between the territory of the Jews and the Gentiles, expressing that God came for the salvation of every human being. Near the Dead Sea (420 m below sea level), the lowest point on earth, symbolizing the abyss of human misery into which God was willing to descend.

Many of us automatically associate Jesus' baptism with our own baptism. However, human baptism is not the primary theme of the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Today's Gospel is about the revelation of God. At the Baptism of the Lord, God reveals himself to man as the Trinity. "The Father anointed, the Son was anointed, the Holy Spirit was the anointing," says St. Irenaeus.

The Gospel of Matthew describes a scene with symbols similar to those in the Baptism once again – this time at Calvary: here Christ "dives" into the waters of death, instead of heaven, the temple curtain is torn, and Jesus gives up his Spirit through death. Jesus' baptism in the Jordan is thus a foreshadowing of his "baptism of death" on Calvary, which completes his mission.

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