

## The Baptism of the Lord

One of the actions I find most consoling about the scene in today's Gospel is that John the Baptist immersed Jesus in the waters of the Jordan. Indeed the word *baptism* is derived from the Greek word, *bapto*, or *baptizo*, to wash or to immerse. Most of us were baptized with just a sprinkling of water. These days, however, the Church encourages adults and infants, where possible, to follow in the more ancient tradition of full immersion. We all know the amount of water used in the baptism does not destine the power of the sacrament—that's found in how we live our Christian commitment away from the font. What full immersion does is link the ritual of baptism more directly to the experience of Jesus and enables the symbolism of the water to be more fully realized.

There are no half measures about immersion, we are in there boots and all. In an extraordinary visual metaphor Mark tells us this is what God does for us in Christ. We don't have a detached God who only presides over us. We don't have a coaching God who sits on the sidelines barking orders at us on the field of life. And we don't have a policeman God who wants to catch us breaking the rules. We have a God who in Jesus the Lord immersed himself in our world, heart and mind, soul and divinity, boots and all.

This is why the earliest association the Christians made with the waters of baptism was that it symbolized Jesus' tomb. We are the only world religion to believe that God took our flesh and died. Because of the three days Jesus spent in the tomb, we plunge our adults and children into the watery tomb of the font three times. And as we do we call on the Trinity to enable them to die to sin, and rise to the freedom of Christ's life. In this context we can see that the deeper the font and the fuller the immersion, the more easily everyone present understands the power of the symbols.

For all those baptized in Christ, a curious thing happens. As Jesus fully immersed himself in our world, so we are fully immersed in Christ. But we are not spared from the world as if we are initiated into a reclusive religious sect. We are sent out to the world knowing, because of Jesus, that we are loved by God and are pleasing to God. We are sent out with faith, hope, and joy to fall into the arms of the world and discover that here, too, is where Christ dwells.

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