

Baptism of the Lord

In the sacrament of baptism God adopts us as sons and daughters and incorporates us into the body of Christ. Baptism also forgives sin. For these reasons, the baptism of Jesus has always puzzled Christians. He was God's Son from the incarnation, not from his baptism. And he had no sin that needed forgiveness. Obviously, his baptism was not the same as ours. His baptism did not change who he was; it revealed who he was. We are baptized in order to become like Christ.

Catholics baptize infants because God offers love and life from our birth. Most other Christian denominations do the same. Christians have baptized infants since the first century.

Baptizing infants is not just a privilege. It is a responsibility. Our Code of Canon Law says, "Parents are obliged to take care that infants are baptized in the first few weeks; as soon as possible after the birth or even before it, they are to go to the pastor to request the sacrament for their child and to be prepared properly for it" (867/1).

At St. Anthony's we baptize children if their parents have been members here for six months. That gives me some indication that parents have made the Church part of their lives, and that they will raise their children in the faith. If I have no evidence that parents and godparents are practicing the faith, it is hard for me to know that they are prepared to hand it on to their children.

Parents and godparents attend a baptism preparation class. I encourage parents to have their children baptized as soon as possible after birth. Sometimes parents say to me, "We'd like to have the baptism of one child while we celebrate the first communion of another." Or even "We'd like to have the baptism of our children when we get married in the church." But if you have children who have not been baptized, the time to baptize them is now. Not later, now. The children are missing out on the grace of this sacrament, and our community has a responsibility to share God's life with them.

I'd like to thank the parents who enroll their children in our religious education program on Wednesday nights. Children and adults need religious education throughout our lives. One sign that a family is committed to the faith is when adults participate in religious education, and children come to classes every year - not just the year of their first communion. A child who has received first communion has not graduated from religious education. That child belongs in class here every Wednesday night. That will help them grow in faith in the midst of a culture that is trying to teach them other values.

After his baptism, Jesus proclaimed the gospel. After our baptism we join him in this ministry. Let us praise God for the good children we have in this parish who have been baptized, are receiving education, and are showing us their faith in Christ.