

What's the difference between 1000 B.C. and A.D. 1000? The obvious answer is 2,000 years. But the essential answer is *Jesus Christ*.

Jesus was so important that our BC/AD dating system [Before Christ and Anno Domini, Latin for in the year of Our Lord] was developed to reflect that the birth of Jesus was the dividing point of world history, and to acknowledge that His birth, ministry, death, and resurrection were history's turning points. Nothing was the same after Jesus.

Not coincidentally, each of these "turning points" is represented by the joyful, luminous, sorrowful and glorious mysteries of the rosary, and the first luminous mystery is the Baptism of Our Lord. Let me give you an idea of how important that event was:

1. All four of the gospel writers reference the Baptism of the Lord;
2. Mark, the first gospel writer, *begins* his gospel with the Baptism of the Lord;
3. Luke tells us today that John the Baptist, believed by some to even be the Messiah, publicly declares he isn't even worthy to unfasten Jesus' thongs of His sandals;
4. And if that's not enough, the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus in bodily form, like a dove, and the voice of Our Heavenly Father proclaims that Jesus is His beloved Son.

But why? If baptism is about repentance, why is Jesus is being baptized at all? In Luke, 1: 76 – 77, Zechariah, John the Baptist's own father, proclaims: "And you, my child, will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go **before** the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation **through the forgiveness of their sins.**"

But Jesus was like us in all things **BUT** sin. So if baptism is solely about repentance, Jesus didn't need it and would have avoided it. Yet he demanded to be baptized...why?

I believe that the clue to the answer to that question is linked to one word in the passage I just read...the word: **before**. *You will go before the Lord*. If you understand **before** to mean *a place in time*, instead of *in advance or ahead of the Lord*, you get a better understanding of the importance of this Gospel.

Before Jesus, baptism was solely about a person repenting of sin, which emersion in water could symbolically represent. But at Jesus' baptism, while He was baptized with water, it was the Father and the Holy Spirit who were present to anoint Jesus priest, prophet and king...to enable Him to begin His public ministry to bring us to the Father.

AFTER Jesus' baptism, we too could be anointed priest, prophet and king. We could become members of Jesus' body of believers on earth. Our purpose would now be to discover Jesus, to follow Jesus and to share Jesus as the way to come to know His Father and receive an inheritance in heaven, the place the Father has prepared for us.

For Jesus, Baptism was the first and last act of His ministry on earth. His baptism we hear about today began that ministry; His command to the apostles to *go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* ended that ministry. For Jesus, everything was about bringing all to understand the love of His Father. Everything was about giving us hope...free and there just for the asking.

Today marks the end of the Christmas Season and the beginning of Christ's public ministry. From here, we'll follow Jesus through the gospels as He heads into the desert to pray, encounters the temptations of the devil, puts the devil in its place, then focuses the remainder of His life on proclaiming the good news of our salvation.

Jesus' baptism forever changed the world. It gave us not just the way to have our sins forgiven, but the means to be initiated into God's family. It gave us purpose and responsibility...the purpose of accepting Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior, and the responsibility of bringing others to Him by loving Him with our whole heart, our whole mind and our whole soul...and by loving neighbor as self.

Because of what Jesus does today, we can be baptized into His death...and because of what He will do at Easter, we can be buried into His Resurrection. And for the sins we commit after baptism, He gave us the beautiful sacrament of Reconciliation.

Yes, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord that we celebrate today is theologically important. But at the human level, it just shows how much God loves us by sending His Son to become human so that we could have the opportunity to become divine...and that kind of love will stand the test of time, regardless of what time scale you use to measure it.