

The Baptism of Jesus – A Theophany of the Most Holy Trinity



Then Jesus appeared: He came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. John tried to dissuade Him. “It is I who need baptism from You,” he said, “and yet You come to me.” But Jesus replied, “Leave it like this for the time being; it is fitting that we should, in this way, do all that righteousness demands.” At this, John gave in to Him. As soon as Jesus was baptized He came up from the water, and suddenly the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on Him. And a voice spoke from heaven, “This is my Son, the Beloved, and my favour rests on Him.” (Jerusalem Bible, Matthew 3:13-17)

In the past many of the eastern and orthodox churches celebrated in various ways the Nativity of Jesus, the visit of the Magi and the Baptism of Jesus on or in connection with the Epiphany on January 6th, seeing them all as manifestations of Jesus’ divinity. They likewise connected these events to the miracle at Cana which many believed occurred on January 6th. Thus arose the custom of blessing the waters. The word “epiphany” means “to show,” “to reveal,” “a manifestation,” especially in regards to a divine person. The celebration as such originated in the Eastern Church in AD 361 as a manifestation of God in human form in the person of Jesus, a revelation to all the world, with a special focus at that time on the Baptism of Jesus. These manifestations confirmed the Sacred Divinity of Christ as the Son of God in our flesh, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Savior of the world and the fulfillment of God’s Promise to our forefathers in the Faith. In time the Roman Church separated the feasts, moving the Nativity to December 25, the day heathens celebrated the birth of the sun, a most fitting day to celebrate the birth of the Son of God.

Reference: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05504c.htm>

Our current liturgical calendar surrounds the birth of Jesus with feasts of martyrs: St. Stephen, the first martyr who mirrored Christ's forgiveness of his executioners as the heavens opened and he saw the glory of God; St. John the beloved disciple, a martyr of love, the only apostle not to die a martyrdom of blood according to Tradition; the Holy Innocents, victim infant martyrs; and St. Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. Why does the Church put these feasts immediately after the birth of Christ? Precisely as a theological statement! Their martyrdom is testimony to the truth of Christ's Divinity and His redemptive mission. They believed He was the Son of God, our Savior, and gave their lives for that belief. Likewise their lives call us to that kind of witness to Jesus, martyrdom of love and desire, and sometimes even of blood.

The Messiah, the Word made flesh Who dwelt amongst us, was made manifest to the Jewish people in the persons of the Shepherds who tended the sheep that may well have become the lambs of sacrifice on the altar of the temple in Jerusalem. How fitting that these shepherds from the hillside who tended the sheep of sacrifice should visit Him Who would become the Shepherd-King greater than David, the Good Shepherd and the unblemished victim-Lamb of God, all in one. This Lamb of God would choose to lay down His life for His sheep on the altar of sacrifice that is the hill of Calvary, becoming Himself a Perfect Sacrifice to end all other sacrifices, a sacrifice that would not merely signify the forgiveness of sin, temporarily, but would actually forgive sin, forever, and make perfect atonement for it and reconcile the sinner to his God.

The miraculous star revealed to the Wise Men, a Persian priestly cult who studied astrology, led them to Bethlehem by way of Jerusalem and King Herod and carried the Good News of the Messiah-King beyond the chosen race, to all the Gentile world represented by these men who came from various nations beyond Israel. Tradition has called them kings because the gifts they brought were gifts befitting a king, befitting this Child Who will be King of kings and Lord of lords. Isaiah, chapter 60, speaks of kings coming to worship the Messiah and also mentions gold and frankincense. While there were probably more than three, tradition calls them "**Three Kings**" because of the **three** gifts given that symbolically spoke to the meaning of Christ's life and mission: gold for His Kingship of all nations; frankincense for His Eternal Priesthood; and myrrh for His burial as the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. Like the shepherds, these wise men saw something of the glory of God in this Holy Child and were transformed by it.

Those innocent children of Israel murdered in place of the Christ Child were the victims of a madman, Herod the Great, who murdered easily anyone who was a threat to his throne, even his wife and two sons. With the report from the Wise Men of the East of a star that pointed to the birth of a new and great ruler on earth, which the prophet Micah had foretold would be born in Bethlehem of Judea, Herod began his frenzied scourge of any possible challenge to his throne, killing all the Hebrew boys, aged two and under, in Bethlehem and the surrounding areas. Here we see fulfilled the prophetic word of a cry in Ramah, Rachel weeping for her children and she would not be comforted, for they are no more. Regarding the Magi, the Roman Church continued to celebrate Epiphany on January 6th (or the Sunday closest to it) as the visit of the Magi and God's revelation in particular to the Gentiles.

The celebration of Jesus' Baptism was later separated from the Epiphany as well in order to give it its own importance. And why is Jesus' baptism so important? First, it inaugurated the beginning of His public life and His redemptive mission on earth. It is considered Jesus' personal anointing. Secondly, it spoke symbolically to His own death and resurrection as He entered into the River Jordan and rose again, the new Adam. Thirdly, it spoke to His identity with all humankind in that He Who is without sin and has no need of baptism humbly substituted Himself for us and carried our sins into the cleansing waters in order to raise us up to new life. Even as He identified with us in our sinful flesh, so are we identified with Him in His passion and death and resurrection through our own baptisms. Fourthly, Jesus' Baptism speaks powerfully to that attitude of humility that is at the heart of all righteousness. Fifthly, while He was baptized with water by John, He was baptized on high with the Holy Spirit. This was His personal Pentecost to sustain Him throughout the course of His mission. And lastly, and so importantly, His Baptism becomes, not only a manifestation of His Divine Sonship but a revelation of the very nature of God as Trinity, three persons in one godhead, clearly visible as the heavens opened and a voice proclaimed, "This is my Son, the Beloved, and my favor rests on Him," while a dove was seen descending to rest on Him. Surely this is the clearest Theophany of God as Trinity in the New Testament.

Is a theophany different from an epiphany? The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church explains its similarity and its difference in the following words: theophany is "an appearance of God in visible form, [to humans] temporary and not necessarily material. Such an appearance is to be contrasted with the Incarnation, in which there was a permanent union between God and complete manhood (body, soul and spirit). The feast of the Epiphany speaks to the Incarnation of God in flesh in Jesus; the feast of the

Baptism of Jesus, the Theophany of God, speaks to the nature of God in Himself as Trinity, three persons in one godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It was a temporary manifestation, although its significance is for all time. The mysteries of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Incarnation of God in Jesus are at the center, the heart of our Faith because all else depends for its meaning and fulfillment upon these two fundamental truths.

The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in Himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. (Catechism, #234.)

Belief in the true Incarnation of the Son of God is the distinctive sign of Christian faith. "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #463.)

The trinity is foreshadowed in the Old Testament in hidden ways, as in the burning bush to Moses or the Pillar of cloud or fire that led the chosen people through the desert. A most beautiful icon painted around 1410 by Andrei Rublev, depicting the three men who visited Abraham at the Oak of Mamre, is sometimes called the "icon of the Old Testament Trinity," for it is deemed to be a foreshadowing of our New Testament doctrine of a Triune God. All three faces of the figures are identical, signifying their oneness and their co-equal and co-eternal natures, and all three figures wear a blue robe signifying divinity, while each wears a cloak of a different color signifying their own identity and the work attributed to each. Jesus is in the center with his hand on the table/altar and two fingers pointing to the chalice. He wears a red outer cloak and behind Him is a tree for the Tree of Life or the cross, for He is the Redeemer. The Father is on the left, facing Jesus, and has both hands on a staff for He has complete authority over all things. His garment is ethereal for He is the Creator, and behind Him is a house for His dwelling place. The figure on the right facing Jesus is the Spirit, wearing the blue robe of divinity and the green cloak for new life. His hand rests on the altar for it is He who transforms the gifts. Behind him is a mountain that speaks to the heights of encounter with the All Holy for He is God's Love, the Sanctifier. Icons are more than paintings. The monks spend weeks in meditation before painting

their reflections on canvas. These icons are theological studies.



http://www.wellsprings.org.uk/rublevs_icon/Spirit.htm

In the miracle of Cana so often associated with Epiphany and Jesus' Baptism in the past, we see Jesus change water into wine, representing our own new creation through the waters of Baptism, and that deeper transformation where we are changed from our old selves into what we are called to be, His Body, as we dine at His Eucharistic feast where He changes bread and wine into His Body and Blood. The Eucharist is a sign of the heavenly wedding banquet of the Lamb and the wife of the Lamb, His Church, in a glorious celebration of life and love that will never end.

These epiphanies of Christ's divinity and this theophany of the Trinity speak to the heart and soul of the message of "Our Lady of America®." Our Lady addresses herself as the Mother of that Sacred Humanity, the Incarnate God, Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity. The entire message revolves around that central doctrine of the Trinity and sanctifying grace, that Indwelling Presence of the Most Holy Trinity that is gifted to us in Baptism and unites us in intimate communion with our God in the interior castle of our souls. On August 27, 1995, Our Lady spoke to Sister Mildred Mary Ephrem Neuzil who gave us this message.

From the beginning of time every prophecy, every vision, throughout the centuries, will have its fulfillment in Our Lady of America and her message of the Indwelling Trinity living in every soul, which will renew the whole world and destroy Lucifer and all the evil spirits in the fight he is making against the Indwelling Trinity. This will eventually destroy him.

These words are vital in understanding how important this message of "Our Lady of America®" is to America and to the whole world and to every soul. It speaks to the convergence of all of Mary's apparitions in this one, centering them all in the central doctrine of our Faith, that of the Most Holy Trinity. Mary

speaks constantly of her deep concern for our interior lives where God seeks to dwell within us as His living tabernacles in the flesh, His paradise on earth. This message, this doctrine of the Divine Indwelling, the doctrine of sanctifying grace, is so important to the salvation of souls and is so detrimental to Satan's power over souls that he repeatedly tormented Sister Mildred in an attempt to get her to abandon this cause. In that same letter, Our Lady goes on to say:

Have confidence. Just have patience. I know you are suffering a lot. Just trust me and soon you will see the wonders that I am performing, because of my Son and because of the Trinity, [which] will be done throughout the whole world. The young people will be spreading it all over and it will become a new world. This is why the evil spirit Lucifer hates you so. He will do everything he can to stop it [the message of the Indwelling of the Trinity], to make you suffer so that you will lose confidence. But don't ever lose it. Trust me. It will not last forever. I am depending on you and your confidence in me.

This mystery of the Divine Indwelling through sanctifying grace is so important for us to become holy and to live in union with God that St. Joseph gave Sister Mildred these words which he called "*The Secret of Secrets*", words straight from heaven, as she records them in a letter to Father Leibold, her spiritual director, on April 12, 1958.

Dear Father:

Here are some things I feel you should know, for not only will they be of great benefit for you but also for those whom your great love for God will reach.

Like His Holy Spouse, St. Joseph also never ceases to remind me of my first duty, the first duty of every soul, especially for the chosen, of living with God in the interior castle of our hearts. So on March 30th, before voicing his own requests, St. Joseph spoke of this first duty which comes before all others.

"It is time. Kneel my beloved daughter, for God is about to reveal to you a secret of the interior life. Few there are who learn it, and fewer they who live it in its fullness. This SECRET, dear child, is living with Him Who is within you and has made of your soul His Kingdom. There are many who know this Doctrine, but few to whom God reveals its secret operation. Few souls there are who empty themselves of all things that they may possess this SECRET OF SECRETS, this ultimate glory of all living, this union with the Divine, ending in Eternal Vision.

This Secret cannot be written, lovely child. Its deepest meaning will be made known to you in the interior depths of your child-like soul, in your humble heart, where LOVE has found its resting place, its palace beautiful. They who would possess for themselves this mysterious workings of the Divine Secret must strive to cultivate in *silence* and *humility* this love for the Eternal Being within them. We lived this life, beloved child, so to attain it, souls must imitate as far as possible the fullness of our union with The Indwelling God.”

On November 8, 1954, Our Lady spoke on how she and St. Joseph lived that Secret of union with God, in Jesus, in their holy life at Nazareth.

It is the wish of my Son that fathers and mothers strive to imitate me and my chaste spouse in our holy life at Nazareth. We practiced the simple virtues of family life, Jesus our Son being the center of our love and activity. The Holy Trinity dwelt with us in a manner far surpassing anything that can ever be imagined. For ours was the earthly paradise where once again God walked among men.

As in our little home no sin was to be found, so it is the wish of the Heart of my Son and my Immaculate Heart that sin should, as far as possible, be unheard of in the homes of our children.

The Divine Trinity will dwell in your midst only if you are faithful in practicing the virtues of our life at Nazareth. Then, you also, my children, you also will become another paradise. God will then walk among you and you will have peace. (Sister Mildred Neuzil, Diary, “Our Lady of America©,” Fostoria, Ohio, pg. 8.)

Our Lady begs us to come to her so she might teach us how to open our hearts to receive that great secret of union with the Indwelling God.

But to make your hearts grow more and more like to the Heart of the Son, you must go to the Mother, whose heart is most like His. From this pure and Immaculate Heart you will learn all that will make you more pleasing to the Divine Heart of the Son of God. The Holy Trinity looks down with infinite delight upon such souls and makes them its heaven upon earth. (Sister Mildred Neuzil, Diary, pg. 16.)

My heart, my Immaculate Heart, is the channel through which the graces of the Sacred Heart are given to men. ... I will work my miracles of grace only in those who ask for them and empty their souls of the love and attachment to sin and all that is displeasing to my Son. Souls who cling to sin cannot have their hands free to

receive the treasures of grace that I hold out to them. (Sister Mildred Neuzil, Diary, pgs. 18-19.)

In her April 12, 1958 letter to Father Leibold, Sister Mildred recounts Our Lord's words to her. Here we see the essential roles of the Sacraments of Baptism, so richly symbolized in Jesus' own Baptism, for without baptism we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven, and the Eucharist, so richly symbolized in the miracle at the wedding feast of Cana, which is the source and summit of the Christian life and which brings the kingdom so intimately into our own bodies and souls. Through grace God dwells within us; through Eucharist He dwells physically within us for some time so that He might unite more intimately with us, only to take us more fully into Himself where we live and move and have our being.

On Holy Thursday, Jesus came, holding on His hands the Host and the Chalice, saying:

"I am the Host of every Communion. I am Life to all who partake of Me. They who do not eat Me will die, for no one can live who does not partake of Me, for I am Eternal Life. Come, beloved souls, poor sinners so dear to the Heart of Your Host. Come receive Me that you may live and enjoy everlasting happiness in the Kingdom of My Father Who is your Father also. This I have obtained for you through My Body and Blood sacrificed for you on Calvary and become your Food and Drink in the Holy Mass offered constantly for you. Do not disappoint My hopes for I have waited long, oh so long for you. Bring joy to My Heart by letting Me come into yours. It is I alone Who can bring you happiness, for only in Me is joy found in its fullness. Come, that you may have Life."

Mary is the first fruits of the Redemption, the splendor of Creation, the model of Faith for every wise person who seeks the Lord. She is the Immaculate Tabernacle of the Indwelling God. Sister Mildred describes Mary's appearance as "Our Lady of the Divine Indwelling©."

Our Lady was standing on a globe, her right foot resting on a crescent or quarter moon, the left on the snout of a rather small and very ugly looking dragon. I saw fire come out of his huge jaws, but not very much, as he could not open them wide enough because of Our Lady's foot. At times he seemed to be somewhat black, again of a shade of green. Our Lady was all in white. Her veil was so long that it seemed to envelop the globe halfway. Sometimes the veil appeared so transparent that Our Lady's hair could be seen through it, and the hair seemed to be sparkling with the light of many glittering stars. At times the edges of the veil,

sleeves, and garments seemed to be outlined in light. The veil was held about her head by a wreath of white roses. Her feet were bare.

The previous day Our Lady had appeared with her hands outstretched. At this second visit she slowly raised them, then crossed them on her breast rather close to her waist. While doing so, she bent her head slightly forward, and it seemed that her eyes were closed, not just lowered. On her breast, as though through a veil, the Triangle and the Eye, which is often depicted as the symbol of the Divine Indwelling, could be visibly seen. I said that Our Lady's feet were bare, that is, devoid of any kind of footwear, but on each foot was a large white rose. The roses, both on the feet and on the crown, were of such dazzling whiteness that the outlines of the petals could barely be seen, sometimes not at all. It seemed that a strong beam of light streamed from the Divine Presence within Our Lady onto the globe at her feet. Then halfway around the figure of Our Lady above her head appeared a scroll on which were written in letters of gold the words: "All the glory of the King's daughter is within."

Though it did not appear that her lips moved, yet I heard these words quite plainly: "I am Our Lady of the Divine Indwelling, handmaid of Him Who dwells within." (Sister Mildred Neuzil, Diary, pgs. 22-23.)

"Bring joy to my Heart by letting me come into yours," Jesus said.

Will we let Him in?

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