

After Christmas midnight Mass priest wished a jampacked congregation, which included many new faces, “Merry Christmas and Happy Easter!”

The people wondered why he included Easter. The priest explained, “It’s because the next time they will show up in church again will be on Easter.”

This was just a joke, but it shows a sad reality that after baptism many of us Christians are never seen in church again. According to some estimate about 60 percent of baptized Christians stop coming to the Church after baptism or come only on Christmas and Easter.

Some people come to the church three times in their life. 1st to get baptized then water is thrown or poured on them, second to get married then, rice is thrown on them and third and last for the funeral, then dirt is thrown on them

Flies in the church and baptism and they don’t come back.

Today we celebrate the baptism of Jesus by John in the River Jordan, by which Christ reveals himself to repentant sinners.

**T**he baptism of Our Lord Jesus by John the Baptist in the River Jordan is an important event in Jesus' life with profound significance. Its importance is characterized with the fact that all the three Evangelists of the Synoptic Gospels, viz. St. Matthew, St. Mark & St. Luke speak of this striking event. Although there are slight differences in their individual accounts - in reality however, all of them unanimously agree that the baptism of Our Lord Jesus also marks the beginning of his public ministry.

*One may wonder, and even find it difficult to understand, and may ask the question: 'Why did Jesus need to be baptized by John the Baptist in the first place?'*

John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and therefore, most of those coming to him were repentant sinners. But Jesus was sinless; he did not commit any sin; so, in no way did he need this baptism of John the Baptist.

Neither John nor Jesus invented baptism. It had been practiced for centuries among the Jews as a ritual equivalent to our Confession. Even in non-Jewish religions like Hinduism and Sikhism, a kind of ritual cleansing was practiced long before Christianity. Hindus believe that immersion in the Holy river Ganges will cleanse you from all your sins. Similarly, outside every Sikh temple, there is a pond of water where each devotee is supposed to wash his or her feet before entering the temple symbolizing a ritual cleansing. So, the Baptism of John was a kind of ritual cleansing for repentance of and forgiveness of sins. Jesus goes through this ritual cleansing though he was sinless and there was no need for him to do so.

He did it first: To identify with us sinners. Though, sinless, Jesus received the baptism of repentance to identify himself with his people, who realized for the first time that they were sinners.

Second, it was a moment of reaffirming about his identity and mission: that He is the Son of God and His mission was to preach the Good News of God’s love and salvation and to atone for

our sins by becoming the “*suffering servant.*” God the Father’s words, “*This is My beloved Son,*” taken from Psalm 2:17, reveal Jesus’ identity as God’s Son, and the words “*with whom I am well pleased,*” from Isaiah 42:1 (referring to the “suffering servant “), pointed to Jesus’ mission of atoning for the sins of the world by His suffering and death on the cross

Third, it was a moment of equipment. The Holy Spirit equipped Jesus by descending on him in the form of dove, giving him the power of preaching and healing

Fourth, it was a moment of decision for Jesus to begin public ministry at the most opportune time after receiving the approval of his Heavenly Father as His *beloved Son.*

As we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus let us remember our own baptism and try to live those baptismal promises in our day today lives so that as God could say the same words at the time of our death which he said at the time of our baptism, “This is my beloved son/daughter with whom I am well pleased”.

By Baptism not only our sins are forgiven but also, we get a new identity and become children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus, members of his Church, heirs of Heaven, and temples of the Holy Spirit.

Just like Jesus’ baptism our baptism also gives us a mission. The mission: to proclaim the good news of salvation to others. This may not require us to die on the cross but will certainly require some sacrifices.

One of the highlights of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land is a communal immersion up to the knees in the river Jordan, to renew the promises of our baptism. It is a moving experience when one recalls the Spirit descending, and the Father confirming each of us as his son or daughter. Many of those who experienced it remember that moment with great emotion and use it to renew their commitment.