

Last week we celebrated the arrival of the Magi in Bethlehem. And ten days before that we celebrated the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and the coming of the shepherds to Him. And today we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, which came about 28 years after the Magi. It's difficult for us because we're reading the Gospel message and the narrative of the Gospel and the coming of the Messiah in our own time and in a very, very compressed period. So, for example, the birth of Jesus, December 25th. By April, we'll be observing Holy Week – the events that occurred some 30 years after the birth, or thereabouts. So it's difficult to have a realistic conception of the timeframe involved.

The Baptism of the Lord occurred right at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry. He went from Galilee to the Jordan area where John was preaching and baptizing people. It was a ritual of Judaism, with the idea of public repentance for sin.

When Jesus came up to John, John said, "No, no, You should be baptizing me; not me, you." Jesus' response was let it be this way for the present because that is God's plan. John then sees the Holy Spirit, the dove, descend from Heaven and settle on Jesus, and a voice from the Heavens that says, "This is my beloved Son; listen to Him."

It wasn't too much longer after that, another maybe like 3 years, a John sent disciples to Jesus to say, "Are you He who is to come, or should we look for somebody else?" The Gospel doesn't make it clear whether John's question was sent to Jesus for purposes of clarifying things in John's own mind, or whether it was for the purpose of clarifying things for his disciples, but he did ask the question. Jesus answer was, "Tell John that you have seen - the deaf hear, the dumb speak, the blind see. That would be all of the things the Prophet Isaiah said that the Messiah would do." In other words, I'm doing (Jesus talking) I'm doing the things that Isaiah said the Messiah would do, therefore, I must be the Messiah.

Now, in our ordinary lives it's easy to get caught up in question marks. It's easy once we go out of here to not pay a great amount of attention to the reality of what's behind Jesus in the Gospel message. It's actually very easy, even while we're here, in the Mass, even though we might think we have a decent understanding that we're in the presence of a miracle when the bread and wine change into the Body and Blood of Christ – it's easy to lose the focus. It's easy to fall into a pattern of taking it fairly much for granted and be more intent on looking around at whatever else it is that's going on around us as we walk forward here, even though we know we're walking forward to actually receive Jesus.

So the story of John the Baptist is important. The Father said: "This is my beloved Son; listen to Him." We've got to do more than listen. We've got to try to bring ourselves to believe deep down that this message is important for us. The Mass is not just a commemoration. It's not just a nominal kind of thing. It is the real thing.

Jesus is actually the Son of God. He came into the world to give you and me a message and a challenge. The challenge is that in the midst of all of the doubts and opposition we may have in the world, the message is still intended fully for each one of us. We should ask the Lord today to help us realize that message, to understand it, and to actually live up to it while we're here at the Mass, but also, and even more importantly, when we go out into the world.