

On the occasion of Jesus' baptism, it gives us cause to ponder our own baptism. As with all the sacraments, we can talk about the reasons we desire them, the reasons we have our children baptized—or even for those of us who are adult converts—what was our reason, our motivation. Those are good questions, but I think we do well to also ask the question: *What is God intending and doing in this?*

Baptism is of course, one of the seven sacraments Jesus left us. The following two statements are true of each of these sacraments:

- First, they are gifts from God, conferred upon us for the purpose of strengthening us in this life, to help us ultimately, receive eternal life.
- Secondly, each one of the sacraments bears an effect upon us because it contains grace within it, like the electricity that runs through the power lines and provides light in our homes. But each of them does so in its own way.

So, back to the question: *What is God intending and doing in our baptism?* Perhaps asked more simply: *What is the purpose of baptism?*

- We become adopted sons and daughters of God the Father;
- We receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit;
- We are cleansed of the condition of original sin.

Again, like the other sacraments, this gift from God that is baptism, is conferred upon us for the purpose of strengthening us in this life, to help us ultimately, receive eternal life. So, if all that's true for us, we might ask on this feast: *Why was Jesus baptized?*

A saint, by the name of Maximus, Bishop of Turin, who died in the year 465 AD, answered that question this way:

*“Christ is baptized, not to be made holy by the water, but to make the water holy...to purify the waters which he touched...For when the Savior is washed all water for our baptism is made clean, purified at its source for the dispensing of baptismal grace to the people of future ages.*

*...As the column of fire went before the sons of Israel through the Red Sea so they could follow on their brave journey; the column went first through the waters to prepare a path for those who followed...At the time of the Exodus the column provided light for the people who followed; now it gives light to the hearts of believers. Then it made a firm pathway through the waters; now it strengthens the footsteps of faith in the bath of baptism” (Sermo 100, de sancta Epiphania 1, 3: CCL 23, 398-400).*

Jesus made the water holy, so that the water could make us holy. In baptism, as newly adopted sons and daughters, we receive the first installment of what God holds in store for us: eternal life.

I remember years ago, having a conversation with someone I love very much, who had just come home from a transformative spiritual retreat. She was so charged up, telling me about what she experienced and how she felt. I remember her saying, *“I want to get rebaptized”*.

I should explain she was not Catholic. I should also explain that among the broad assortment of other Christian denominations, there are varied understandings of what baptism is.

I considered what she said. There's enough love and trust between us, that I felt confident I could speak honestly and directly. I told her, *“You don't need to be rebaptized. In fact, you would only be simulating the ritual of baptism if you were to pursue it. You are already baptized, and you received within you, supernatural graces that may not be known to you, and may not have been actualized by you, but they are still there. You need now to only begin to draw upon those graces within, that they may help you be who God has always seen you to be from the moment he looked down upon you at your baptism, declaring, ‘This is my beloved daughter in whom I am well pleased’”*.

So, for you: When is the last time you thought about your baptism, and more to the point, what God desired for you in that moment?

Ever since that moment, when you received that infusion of grace, through all the days, weeks, months and years that have since transpired...through all the good choices you've made, and through all the destructive ones, that grace has remained in you, like precious jewels kept in a safe-deposit box that only you can open. It's not too late to draw upon that grace. You need only desire it, and to act upon that desire.