

Baptism of the Lord (A)
January 11, 2026
“Jordan, Dove, Voice”

A preacher in the South preached constantly on water baptism. The people became tired of the same subject week after week, and complained. The deacons finally suggested that the pastor preach on something else. He agreed, “Okay, give me a text, and I’ll preach on it.” They gave him Genesis 1:1 (“*In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth . . .*”). Next Sunday, the preacher began, “By request today’s text is Genesis 1:1.” He read it and said, “When the Lord created the earth, he made it one-quarter land and three-quarters water, which brings us to the subject of baptism. . . .”

We cannot escape the subject of baptism, which is the beginning of the Christian life. Saint Matthew’s account of Our Lord’s baptism is brief but filled with insight. Three words summarize the message: *Jordan, dove, and voice.*

Our Lord was baptized in the **Jordan** River. The name Jordan comes from the Hebrew word *Yarden*, derived from the verb *yarad*, meaning “to descend” or “to flow downward.” The Jordan River is 156 miles long, flowing from Mount Hermon in northern Israel to the Dead Sea in the south. This was the place Jesus went after a 25-mile journey to be baptized. The Jordan is a special river because it literally touched the Person of Jesus. It is a river of life and salvation. Here Jesus descended and was baptized by John. He didn’t need baptism, but he chose baptism in order to make the waters holy and set a good example. As Maximus of Turin once said: “In the Old Testament, the pillar of cloud led Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 13:21), so too,

Jesus led his people through the waters of baptism to the shores of the Promised Land of Heaven.”

The baptismal font is, therefore, a mini-Jordan River. Every time an infant or adult is brought to the font, he or she is immersed, cleansed, reconciled, and made an adopted child of God. Baptism changes us and brings us into the kingdom and the Church. This makes every baptismal font a river of glory.

Saint Matthew tells us that, following his baptism, the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus “like a **dove**.” A dove is an excellent symbol of the Spirit because it is simple, quiet, pure, and graceful. Noah sent a dove twice after the Flood to discover if the waters had receded. The second time it returned with an olive branch in its beak, symbol of peace (Gen. 9:11). The dove represents the peace and uplifting power of the Spirit which transforms us when we are washed in baptism. When the Spirit is present, peace comes to the human heart. The Spirit of innocence washes and renews the heart and soul of the person baptized.

After the Spirit descends, “a **voice**” comes “from the heavens” announcing Jesus as the “beloved Son” of God. The voice is a means of communication. The voice speaks truth and wisdom. The voice articulates a message crafted in the mind and destined for others. There are loud voices, soft voices, harsh voices, and gentle voices. Without the voice or another means, the message remains locked inside us. The voice was the Father’s, announcing to the world the gift of the Son sent to save us.

In baptism, the bishop, priest, or deacon uses the words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” With these words

and a triple immersion, the person is washed, renewed, and sanctified. Words accompany signs in every sacrament, making it an effective sign of grace.

I conclude this Christmas Season with a challenge: Do you know your baptismal date? Most do not, but it was a beautiful day, and one worth remembering. I encourage you to discover it, and put it on your calendar as a day to remember, celebrate, and renew your faith. Jesus, baptized in the **Jordan**, witnessed to by a **dove** and a **voice**, is our Savior. May this feast renew our baptismal faith and promises to renounce evil and pronounce Christ. God bless you.