

Set as a Covenant

January 10, 2021

In pre-Vatican Council II, the Baptism of Our Lord was celebrated on January 13. Now the church celebrates on the Feast of Epiphany or the Sunday after. In Eastern Christian traditions, Catholic and Orthodox, the Baptism of Our Lord is a major feast. For example, in Ethiopia and Eritrea is a national feast, observed secular and ecclesial entities. In the Eritrean/Ethiopian Orthodox tradition the Eucharist is celebrated by a lake or river. After the water is blessed people jump into the water for blessings. Centuries ago, Europeans confused this ritual as if the Ethiopic Church believed in multiple baptisms.

Christmas, Feast of Epiphany and Baptism of Our Lord fall under Theophany (Epiphany), i.e., God's self-revelation or manifestation to humanity through ordinary and extraordinary circumstances. The Scripture readings for this Sunday underline God's interaction with his people. In the first reading says, "I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations." In the second reading we read that God fulfilled his covenant by sending his only begotten Son to us to give us a divine birthright through him. "For the love of God is this, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome."

The Scripture readings further confirm that God's covenant is fulfilled in reality, "The Spirit is the one who testifies, and the Spirit is truth." The Baptism of Our Lord inaugurates the public ministry of Jesus in an extraordinary manner. Though Jesus came to be baptized by John as an ordinary Jew, God puts him on the spot, "On coming up out of the water he (John) saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'" St. John in his Letter and Gospel underlines, "Now the testimony of God is this that he has testified on behalf of his Son." Jesus tell us "If you know the truth, the truth will set you free," which is a call for a paradigm shift in our lives, as the Baptism of the Lord became a turning point, unfolding the mystery of our salvation. God has revealed to us in the ordinary and extraordinary ways, what is our response to His manifestation in "Spirit, water and blood" to claim the covenant God has set for us in His Son, Jesus Christ.

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