a Kendall Hunt Company

Baptism of the Lord, Year A, catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for the session, read all the readings:
Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7
Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 9-10
Acts 10:34-38
Matthew 3:13-17

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading that appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background for what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word in Liturgy

Today's celebration marks the end of the Christmas season. Since the scene at the Jordan is presented as the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, today also serves as a bridge into Ordinary Time, which traces the historical unfolding of the ministry of Jesus. Because we are still in the Christmas season, the theme of the incarnation remains important. Jesus' baptism is a sign that he has embraced our full humanity. Prominent in today' readings, and closely associated with last Sunday's celebration of the Epiphany, is the theme of the revelation of God's saving action in the person of Jesus. The Gospel presents his baptism as the time when Jesus is revealed as God's Son, the beloved. It is clear from the ensemble of readings selected for today that the baptism of the Lord is also fundamental to our understanding of the sacrament of baptism as the source of our Christian mission.

The text from Isaiah is one of the "Servant Songs," passages describing a chosen one who will deliver God's people from slavery by his suffering and death. Originally intended as a prophecy of consolation and hope for the Jewish people during the Exile, these poems became messianic texts understood to speak metaphorically of the broader salvation that God would offer to the people in the midst of their moral slavery to sin. Christian tradition has found here allusions both to Jesus' ministry of reconciliation and to his redemptive suffering and death.

Catholic Doctrine

Baptism and Mission

Baptism incorporates the believer into the mystery of Christ, it joins one to the Church, and it provides for us a share in the mission of Jesus. Baptism is seen as the gateway to life in the Spirit. Thus, baptism marks a new beginning, whereby the person is regenerated and made whole by this sacrament, and is made ready by the gift of God for a new life which will be lived in the Spirit.

The term itself, “baptism,” comes from the Greek word for “plunge” or “immerse,” which refers to the use of water, the main symbolic element which conveys the sacrament, along with the words “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” That triple plunging or immersing into the depths, where the body of the baptized is overwhelmed by water, symbolizes dying to the old self. Coming up out of the water corresponds symbolically to being born as a new person in Christ (CCC 1239-40).

Baptism forgives all sin and incorporates one into the life of the Trinity. In this way, believers are given a share in the divine nature. In addition, baptism makes one a member of the body of Christ and of the visible manifestation of that body, the Church.

While Catholics believe that the sacrament of baptism is imparted in a particular moment and by discernable sacramental signs, it is also understood that baptism is meant to be lived and celebrated throughout the believer’s life. Those who rise out of the baptismal waters are charged with the responsibility to lend themselves personally and communally to the mission of Jesus, participating in the apostolic witness of the People of God (CCC 1270). Baptism and mission go hand in hand.