

FR HUGH'S HOMILY FOR THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

In our various ways we have all had to make preparations for Christmas. Shopping, family negotiations, and of course prayer. All of this is done for a major event that many people depend on. Just recently I have seen some people taking down their decorations almost with relief. I asked one woman why she was so keen to get them down so soon and her response was, "Some of us are busy people, Father." That put me in my place.

Now the Jews saw washing as a ritual preparation. John the Baptist and Jesus are both Jews. And the way they prepared for a religious event was a ritual purification where you went down into a form of bath, a mikvah, and washed.

You were washing off the old self, the sins of the old self, and becoming someone worthy of meeting God, and so be a righteous person, fit to meet him. In the Old Testament Moses washed Aaron and others before their Temple duty. A changed person. Putting on a new self.

So when John the Baptist calls the people out into the desert it is to wash, to symbolically remove their sins and be ready to meet God. This raises lots of questions.

So why was the arrival of Jesus so different? Why was his baptism so different? Why if he was sinless, as the Son of God, did he need to be baptised, just as John the Baptist questions him? "Why you?"

Firstly Jesus wanted to show that he stood in a long line of righteous people. But he wanted to show others that this is how we should prepare to meet his Father.

He was without sin, but wanted to lead them in the tradition of the people of God.

But then, as the Son of God, he was both going to change the purpose of the ritual bath, and show how it would now change them. His washing, his baptism, draws them into his own life, as the Son of God, but this change was not just going to be symbolic it was going to change their whole being by living his life and death and resurrection, entering into all that he was going to share with and for them. By entering that water (entering now into his death) and coming out of the water into his resurrection the life of the baptised was changed to be like his. We are putting on Christ as St. Paul would say. We are different people now.

We may not get this at first. Who knows how much Jesus did at first? But his baptism was also preparation for his life to come, for his mission to heal and save the world. Our baptism changes us to awaken as fellow missionaries. Missionaries to tell others what he has done for us. To invite people into this new changed life, starting with that changing ritual of baptism and so enter his Church.

If we ever ask the question, "Why am I here?" This is the answer. How can I know that I can be able to be such a missionary? Because at our baptism God says us, "You are my beloved child, in whom I am well-pleased."