

Dear Friends,

It's time for a brief montage. A set of quick glimpses of Jesus growing from a baby to a boy to an adolescent to a man. You know the kind of thing. A series of glimpses that show time passing. Jesus plays with his younger sisters and brothers; he learns to read, study the scriptures, and debate with his teachers; Joseph teaches him carpentry; Mary comforts him when he's sad and then perhaps he comforts Mary because Joseph has died. With each glimpse, Jesus gets a little older until we see him hugging Mary and saying "Goodbye". She watches him go until he's out of sight. He keeps turning back until he can no longer see her.

He is going to visit John. John, you will remember is the son of Elizabeth and Zechariah. Elizabeth and Mary were pregnant at the same time. They are all family. John has been baptising people in the river Jordan. Word about him has spread. Crowds of people are gathering to hear him speak and get baptised. Jesus becomes one of the many who go to him.

John's baptism is one of "repentance for the forgiveness of sins". To repent is to change your mind, your way of thinking, your attitudes. This change brings about a transformation of your way of being and living. The best picture of it is the one we saw recently of the Prodigal Son. He had travelled away from his father. When things got really bad, he came to his senses, turned around and travelled back to his father. To repent is to come to your senses, change your mind and change your direction. It is to turn away from all that denies God and to turn to God. It is only possible to make this change with the grace of God.

Those who are going to be baptised are saying that they are ready for this, they want God to make this change in them. They want to open themselves to God; say "Yes" to God; and then wait patiently for God to act in whatever way God wants. They hope to be changed in the waters of baptism, in them they hope to be rescued from sin and raised to new life; in them they hope to find God's healing and therapy that will restore their souls and bring them back to life again.

So why does Jesus join the crowd. Why does he need to be changed? John tries to stop him from being baptised. He says, "it's not you that should be baptised by me, it's me that should be baptised by you. Why do you come to me?" But Jesus insists. He says, "It is right for us to do all that God requires". His answer shows that he's about God's business as he is always about God's business. So, why does he need to be baptised?

One answer is that Jesus is baptised in order to level with us. He meets us where we are. He comes to fully enter into the experience of being human, to show total solidarity with us. So, as people are called to enter the water of baptism so too Jesus will enter that water.

But maybe there is something else. Others knew that they needed to be given a transformation, they needed to be changed in the water, they needed God to change them. Perhaps with Jesus it's the other way around. He goes in to the water in order to bring transformation, to make changes. He wants to make a change in everything. As he is filled with God, he wants to fill everything with God so that heaven and earth may be filled with the glory of God.

God bless you,

Tony