

On January 19, 383 the Christian Roman Emperor Theodosius named his son Arcadius as co-emperor. At that time the Arian Heresy was spreading across the Roman Empire. The followers of Arian believed that Jesus Christ was not fully God and many were coming to believe this as well. Emperor Theodosius felt that a compromise could be found.

One bishop who was not willing to compromise his faith in the divinity of Christ was Amphilochus of Iconium, who suffered great persecution because of his position. On the day of the co-emperor's coronation (that would be Arcadius), Bishop Amphilochus entered the hall, bowed to the Emperor, but ignored his son, the co-emperor.

The Emperor responded by saying, "*Do you take no notice of my son, the co-emperor, whom I have made equal in dignity?*"

And to this the bishop responded in kind: "*Sir, do you resent my apparent neglect of your son, because I do not give him equal honor with yourself? What, then must the eternal God think of you, who have allowed his coequal and coeternal Son be degraded in His proper divinity in every part of your empire? Do you not remember God the Father's proclamation on the day Jesus was baptized in the Jordan?*"

The emphasis of Christmas was about God becoming one with humanity. However, the emphasis of this feast concerns Jesus' divinity and our identity with that divinity. We see in this Gospel that for the first time God is (explicitly) fully revealed as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: The Father speaks from heaven, the Son is present and the Holy Spirit descends.

Many ask, "*If Jesus was God, why did he get baptized?*" I would say he was baptized precisely *because he is God.*

John baptized only symbolically with simple water representing a person's commitment to repent, to change their lives. The water did nothing to assist this, but only represented the hope that one might to do so (That is why it would be unlikely that John baptized babies.)

Take one's marriage ring, as an example. +I once had a wedding where the Best Man bolted and I was thinking, "*What the heck is going on?*" He had left the rings in his car. It is nice to have the ring, but it does not make a marriage, for it is only symbolic of a couple being committed to one another.

John practically says this himself, "*I am baptizing only with water* (a symbol)...*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*"

Jesus enters the water to infuse it with the *fire of his divinity*. When Christ came out of that water, he replaces the symbol with *reality*, as it now *does what it symbolizes*. It is not just a symbol of love, it is love. It is not just a symbol for forgiveness, for it is forgiveness.

+When a mother gives birth to a newborn infant, the child is eventually placed back in the mother's arms. The mother holding that child is a symbol of love, but she is also love to that child and the child will be changed because of it, not just then, but throughout the child's life as

the parent's continue to love her. Baptism works the same way – we are immediately placed in God's hands – embraced with divine love then and throughout our lives.

In Jesus' baptism God reveals that the Son is fully divine and that we who follow him will become *one with his divinity*. It is for this reason God says of us in our own baptism, "*My son... my daughter*" as Christ's divinity becomes incarnate within us. It is then that God sees the Son, in us.

+In the movie, *The Jerk*, starring Steve Martin, there is a poignant scene in which an adult Steve Martin openly weeping because he told by his parents that he was adopted. He says such things as, "*I never knew! Why didn't you tell me sooner?*" Well, the family that surrounded him was African American. That is what baptism does - it makes us one in God, where no one sees any differences, only Christ incarnate.

Today's feast is a perfect bookend to the Christmas Season: We started with the incarnation of Christ and today it is now Christ becoming incarnate within us through baptism.

In the water of the font, we literally lose our identity of Adam as we take on a new name, Christian.

+French writer Henri Barbusse (1874-1935) tells of a conversation overheard in a trench of wounded men during the First World War. One of the men, who knew he only had minutes to live says to another man, "*Listen, Dominic, you've led a very bad life. Everywhere you are wanted by the police. But there are no convictions against me. My name is clear, so here, take my wallet, take my papers, my identity, take my good name, my life and quickly, hand me your papers that I may carry all your crimes away with me in death.*"

Yes, in baptism we *take on a new identity* as Christ takes our old identity, the sins of Adam, to die on the cross of his Passion. And now we carry his name, Christian.

Just as my father might say to me, "*Patrick you carry the Golden name. Honor it, never bring it shame.*" Christian is our true family name and we are to honor it in how we live so that God the Father might be "*well pleased.*"

We enter the Church through baptism and that is why the baptismal font is symbolically placed at the entrance of the church, as a reminder where our life began, born into this family. We were born from the womb of Mother Church and the priest as the nervous father, surrounded by elder siblings.

And it is also at the baptismal font that every funeral begins, remembering that day we were born as children of God and now leave with the hope of being born into the arms of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

What God will say to us all depends upon how we have lived out our baptism. It is our hope that he will finish the second part of sentence spoken to Jesus, "*My son...my daughter, of whom I am well pleased*".