

The Little Flower Newsletter

A Supplement to the St. Therese Parish Bulletin



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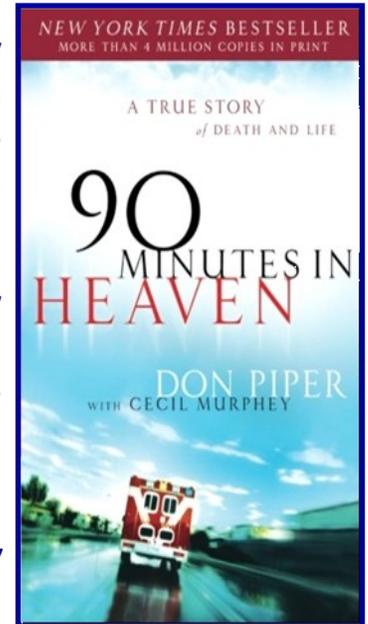
Greetings from the Pastor

Blessed Christmas-Epiphany Season everyone!
(it goes all the way to Feb 2nd—Candlemas)!

As we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord this coming Sunday (January 10, 2021), let us take some time to find out the day of our own Baptisms and incorporations into His Death and New Life, and make concrete plans to celebrate it each year! Just call the church where you were baptized, and they can look up the date for you.

Just as the heavens were torn open at Jesus' Baptism (that's how excited the Father was to reveal His Son to us!) so, too, at ours! And so, ever since our Baptisms, we already have one foot in Heaven (and the other on a banana peel, as Fr. John Hampsch, CMF, liked to say!).

So, what is Heaven like? Here is one man's experience, taken from a book he wrote after a near-death experience he went through (*Ninety Minutes in Heaven* by Don Piper):



“When I died, I didn’t flow through a long, dark tunnel. I never felt my body being transported into the light. I heard no voices calling to me or anything else. Simultaneous with my last recollection of seeing the bridge and the rain, a light enveloped me, with a brilliance beyond description. Only that.

In my next moment of awareness, I was standing in Heaven. Joy pulsated through me as I looked around, and at that moment I became aware of a large crowd of people. They stood in front of a brilliant, ornate gate. I have no idea how far away they were; such things as distance didn’t matter. As the crowd rushed toward me, I didn’t see Jesus, but I did see people I had known. As they surged toward me, I knew instantly that all of them had died during my lifetime. Their presence seemed absolutely natural. They rushed toward me, and every person was smiling, shouting, and praising God.

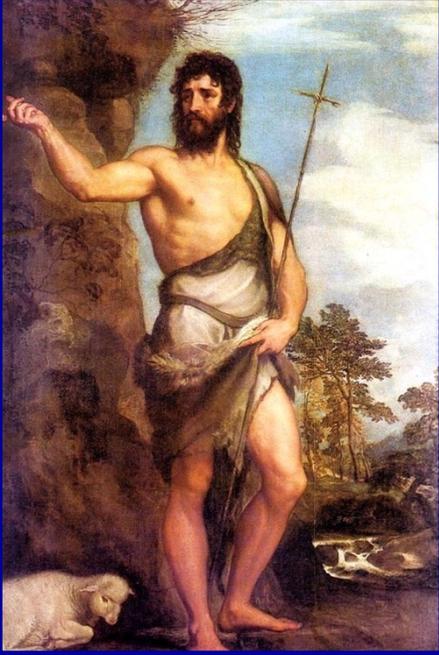


Although no one said so, intuitively I knew they were my celestial welcoming committee. It was as if they had all gathered just outside Heaven’s gate, waiting for me...

(Click the link at the bottom of the e-blast cover to read the rest of the excerpt.)

Who Is St. John the Baptist?

By Jimmy Akin
Catholic Apologist



The Feast of the Baptism of Jesus by St. John the Baptist is always celebrated on the Sunday after Epiphany. Later, we celebrate the birth of John the Baptist on June 24 and the Memorial of the Passion of St. John the Baptist on August 29. So, what do we know about the mysterious John the Baptist? Here are ELEVEN THINGS to know and share:

1) How was John the Baptist related to Jesus? John and Jesus were related through their mothers. We have often heard that Elizabeth was Mary's cousin, but the New Testament does not actually say that. The Greek word used in Luke 1:36 to describe Elizabeth is "*suggenes*," which means "*kinswoman*" (the Greek for cousin is "*anepsios*"). Kinswoman means they were related through marriage or blood. Most likely, it was a blood relationship. Elizabeth, being elderly, may have been an aunt, great-aunt, or one of the many types of "cousin." This means that Jesus and John were cousins in one or another senses of the term.

2) When did John the Baptist's ministry begin? Luke writes: **In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar...the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness;** and he went into all the region about the Jordan,

preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:1-3). The fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar is most naturally understood as a reference to A.D. 29. This is important also because Luke suggests that Jesus' ministry began shortly after John's did, which places the likely date of Jesus' baptism in late A.D. 29 or early A.D. 30.

3) Why did John come baptizing? Scripture tells us he served as the forerunner or herald of the Messiah and was to prepare for Him by fulfilling an Elijah-like role by calling the nation to repentance. In keeping with that, he baptized people as a sign of their repentance. He also came to identify and announce the Messiah. This identification was made when he baptized Jesus: "I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from Heaven, and it remained on Him. ...He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God" (1:32-34).

4) How did John's arrest affect Jesus? The Gospels indicate that the early ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus both took place in Judea, in the southern portion of Israel, near Jerusalem. John was arrested by Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee and Perea, which included part of the wilderness near Jerusalem. This led Jesus to begin His ministry in Galilee: "Now when He heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew into Galilee" (Matthew 4:12).

5) What does John have to teach us about on-the-job morals? He was quizzed by both tax-collectors and soldiers about what they needed to do to be right with God. Both positions required cooperation with the Romans, so they wondered if they had to quit their jobs. John tells them no, but to do their jobs in a righteous manner. This is important for us today as so many are required to cooperate with employers that are—in part—engaged in immoral actions. We read: "Tax collectors also came to John be baptized, and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Collect no more than is appointed you.' Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages'" (Luke 3:12-14).

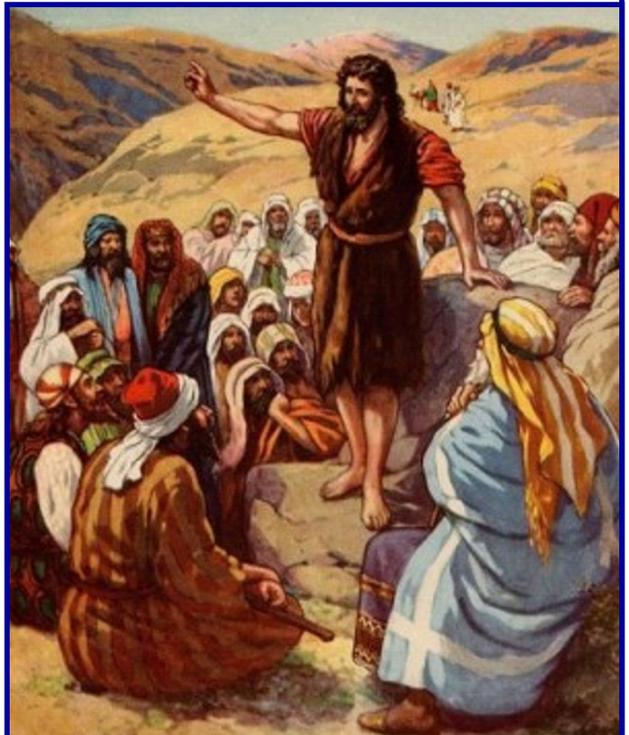
6) Was John the Baptist "Elijah reincarnated"? No. In Jesus' day, the scribes predicted that Elijah would return before the coming of the Messiah. At one point, Jesus was discussing John the Baptist and said, "if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come" (Matthew 11:14). This has led some New Agers to assert that John the Baptist was the reincarnation of Elijah. Besides the fact that the Church does not believe in reincarnation, there are several problems with this. Not the least of which is that Elijah never died. If you read 2 Kings 2:11, you'll see that—instead of dying—Elijah was assumed into Heaven by a whirlwind. Since Elijah never died, he could not be reincarnated. By identifying John the Baptist as the "Elijah" who was to come, Jesus indicated that the fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy was not meant to be taken in a literal way. Elijah himself was not to return and go about Judaea, ministering to people. Instead, someone *like* Elijah was to appear and do this, and that person was John the Baptist.

7) How did he get followers outside of Israel? Apparently, through the preaching of individuals who spread his message elsewhere. One of these seems to have been Apollos, who later became a Christian evangelist. According to Acts: “Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, well versed in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John” (Acts 18:24-25). Apparently, Apollos had some limited knowledge of the connection between John the Baptist and the Messiah. He did not know about Christian baptism and the difference between it and the baptism of John. Aquila and Priscilla gave him supplementary knowledge to complete his understanding of the Christian message (Acts 18:26-28), but word apparently did not get to all of his followers at first. When St. Paul returned to Ephesus, he found about a dozen of Apollos’ apparent disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7). These were converts made by Apollos based on his knowledge of John the Baptist’s movement, before he learned the full message of Christ.

8) Who killed John the Baptist? That would be Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod the Great, who inherited the regions of Galilee and Perea as his territories. At some point, he apparently stole Herodias, the wife of his brother Herod Philip. That put him in opposition to John the Baptist, who opposed the union (Mark 6:18), leading Herod to arrest John (Matthew 14:3). Although he had John in custody, and although his wife hated John and wanted him dead, Herod Antipas served as John’s protector and had a fascination with him: “Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe. When he heard him, he was much perplexed; and yet he heard him gladly” (Mark 6:20). Even John’s death did not end Antipas’ fascination with him. When he began to hear about Jesus, he thought He might be John raised from the dead (Mark 6:14), so he sought to see Jesus (Luke 9:9).

9) Why was John killed? Herod Antipas’ wife, Herodias, hated John with a passion (presumably for publicly criticizing her betrayal of her former husband and then marrying his brother.) Eventually, after her daughter Salome delighted Antipas with a special dance at his birthday party, Herodias was able to manipulate him into giving the order for John’s death by beheading (Mark 6:21-28).

10) Where do we learn of John the Baptist OUTSIDE of the New Testament? From the Jewish historian Josephus. He records that one of Herod’s armies was destroyed in A.D. 36 and states: “**Now, some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod’s army came from God as a punishment for what he did to John, called the Baptist; for Herod slew him, who was a good man. When many others came in crowds about him, for they were greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod—who feared that the influence John had over the people might cause a rebellion (for they seemed ready to do anything He should advise)—thought it best to put Him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it should be too late. Accordingly, John was put to death**” (*Antiquities* 18:5:2). These details from Josephus’ account differ from the Gospel. For one, Josephus was apparently not aware of the role of Herodias and her daughter in the matter, or Herod’s complex relationship with John, and attributes to him the standard suspicion of a prophetic leader that any ruler of the time might have. The Christian community’s awareness of more of the details likely came through a follower of Jesus named Joanna (Luke 8:1-3), who was the wife of Chuza, a steward of Herod Antipas and thus a court insider.



11) Of what is John the Baptist the patron saint? He is the patron saint of builders, tailors, printers, baptism, conversion to the Faith, people dealing with storms, and people who need healing from spasms or seizures.

Why Was Jesus Baptized?

By Carl Olson
Catholic Dispatch

If baptism is necessary for the forgiveness of sins, why did Jesus—who was sinless—insist on being baptized by his cousin, John? And if baptism, as St. Peter wrote, “now saves you...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21), why would the Messiah deem it appropriate, even necessary, to be baptized? What was the point of the Lord’s baptism in the Jordan River?

These and related questions fascinated and perplexed many of the early Church fathers and theologians. The baptism of Christ, writes Fr. Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B., in his study of the topic, *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan: The Trinitarian and Cosmic Order of Salvation* (Liturgical Press, 1996), “was widely discussed in all the currents of theological reflection” in the early Church, “without doubt, partly because of the problems it posed.” From this discussion emerged many helpful theological insights.

St. Justin Martyr (d. 165), one of the first great apologists, addressed the baptism in his *Dialogue with Trypho*. He emphasized that the Son had no need to be baptized—just as He had no need to be born, to suffer, or die—but did so in order to reveal Himself to mankind; the baptism, in other words, was the messianic manifestation, a sign for the Church first, and then the world. When Jesus came to the waters, St. Justin wrote, “He was deemed a carpenter,” but the proclamation of the Father and the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove showed Him to be far more than a mere worker of wood.

In his famous work, *Against Heresies*, St. Irenaeus (d. c. 202) focused on the participation of those who believe in Christ in the anointing of the Savior. The connection between the baptism and anointing—itsself an essential Messianic concept—is already evident in the New Testament, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles: “...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.”

This same anointing, St. Irenaeus wrote, is given to those who are baptized into Christ. The Holy Spirit, having descended upon the Son, has become “accustomed in fellowship with Him to dwell in the human race, to rest with human beings, and to dwell in the workmanship of God, working the will of the Father in them, and renewing them from their old habits into the newness of Christ.”

Others delved into the mystery and meaning of the Jordan River, which was already, at the time of Christ, the site of many key events in the history of Israel. St. Hippolytus (d. 236) referred to “the Grand Jordan”; Origen (d. 254) wrote that just as “no one is good, except the one and only God;” likewise “no river is good except the Jordan.” St. Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394), in his treatise, *On the Baptism of Jesus*, wrote, “For Jordan alone of rivers, receiving in itself the first-fruits of sanctification and benediction, conveyed in its channel to the whole world, as it were from some fount in the type afforded by itself, the grace of Baptism.” Just as Joshua had entered the Promised Land by crossing the Jordan, Jesus opened the way to Heaven by entering and dividing the same waters.

St. Ephrem (d. 373) wrote a beautiful hymn in which he connected the baptism of Jesus with the womb of Mary and the Sacrament of the Eucharist:

“See, Fire and Spirit in the
womb that bore you!
See, Fire and Spirit in the
river where you were baptized!
Fire and Spirit in our Baptism;
In the Bread and the Cup,
Fire and Holy Spirit!”

Christ, the Light of the World, dwelt first in the womb of the Virgin—who was thus “baptized” by her Son—and then in the womb of the Jordan; He emerged from both as the Incarnate Word, the Savior of mankind. Those who are baptized thus become the children of Mary and partakers of the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of her Son.



The Baptism of Our Patroness

Our patroness, St. Thérèse, the youngest child of Sts. Louis and Zélie Martin, was baptized on January 4, 1873—only two days after her birth—at **Notre Dame of the Assumption in Alençon, France** (the same church at which her parents were married in 1858 and at which Zélie's funeral took place in 1877). Construction on the nave of the current structure began as early as 1337. Aisles were added in about 1470, and substantial work on the church continued until the early 16th century. (Note: By virtue of its connection with the Martin family and in recognition of its status as a place of pilgrimage, the church was designated a minor basilica by Pope Benedict XVI on August 10, 2009, the same year as the beatification of Louis and Zélie Martin, and is now known as the Basilica of Notre-Dame of the Assumption).



Thérèse was the only one of her siblings to be baptized at Notre-Dame since her parents had moved back to that parish in 1871 to live in Zélie's girlhood home on Rue Saint-Blaise; the other Martin children were all baptized at St. Pierre de Monsort, which is in a different neighborhood of Alençon. Thérèse's godparents were her eldest sister, Marie (age 12) and her father's friend's son, Paul-Albert Boul (age 9).

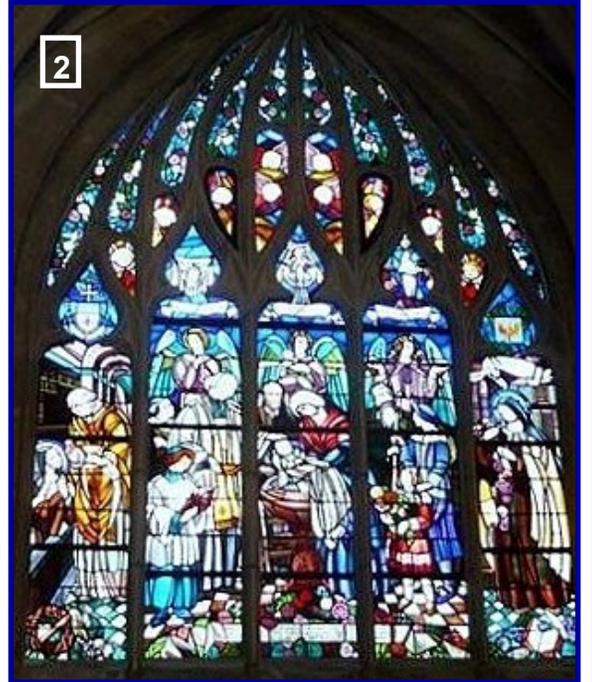
Just before Thérèse's older sister, Léonie, was baptized in 1863, her godmother gave the Martins a christening robe. It was first worn by Léonie and then by each of her six younger siblings, including Thérèse (the last to wear it), at their christenings. Today the robe is displayed under glass above the baptismal font in the Basilica of Notre Dame in Alençon.



Thérèse's baptism is also commemorated in the basilica by a magnificent stained-glass window, **designed by Alençon artist Louis Barillet**, which was installed in 1925, the year of her canonization. The window depicts Thérèse and her parents by the font; in the panel to the right of them are the godparents, Marie and Paul, holding the baptismal candle, with Celine (age 3) standing by Marie (Marie's hand is on her shoulder); in the panel to the left is Pauline, standing behind the celebrating priest. On July 17, 1944, during World War II, the Church suffered enormously in the Allied bombardment of the city. However, miraculously, the Barillet window survived completely undamaged!

On this page and the following page are photos of the baptismal font, the baptismal robe, the interior and exterior of the basilica, and the stained glass window commemorating Thérèse's baptism.

Photos of Notre-Dame, Alençon



1 & 3: Exterior/Interior of Notre Dame Basilica in Alençon; 2: Stained glass window in NDB commemorating the baptism of St. Therese; 4-6: Insets of the baptism window; 7: A stained glass window in NDB honoring St. Thérèse

