

## **Baptism of our Lord ©**

One thing which religious faith does is to give meaning to our lives in this present world. I know people these days feel more at home with the word 'spiritual' than religious but 'spiritual' could mean anything, even worshipping trees or inanimate objects whereas religious faith in Christ is focussed on a person, not an object.

I notice on December 21<sup>st</sup> 5000 people gathered at Stonehenge to witness the rising sun. We've just celebrated Christmas which we're told replaced the pagan Feast of the invincible Sun. Stonehenge is pre-Christian.

At Easter we worship a real living person come back from the Dead and present with us and for us in this and every Mass. The people at Stonehenge are making a God out of the rising Sun which was understandable for our ancient ancestors who knew no better. But for Christians it's surely different. Christmas, and indeed Easter replaced Pagan festivals associated with the Sun. and infused them with Christian meanings.

It is at our baptism that we are infused with the gift of faith to see life through Christian lens, as it were.

Having no religious faith is not cool, despite what some people would have us believe. At our baptism all the merits of Christ's death and resurrection are applied to us. When parents delay baptism for their children until they are old enough to decide for themselves are they not depriving them of the merits of Christ's death and Resurrection which is freedom from sin, removing them from the Kingdom of Darkness to that of Light and making them heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven where they are destined to share forever in the life of the Blessed Trinity. Depriving children of this is like letting them go without food.

But, as Pope Francis said this week, baptism is not just a formality; it has to be lived out.

Living out my baptism will mean that certain things take precedence over others. John, the Baptist points the way in this regard. His whole life and ministry was focussed on Christ, putting himself last in the process. He said: "the person coming after me is more important than I am – I'm not fit to undo his sandal strap'. He must increase and I must decrease". He risked his life in daring to challenge King Herod who had flouted the Mosaic Law by marrying his brother's wife which he wasn't allowed to do. John's focus is all on Jesus, finally giving up his life for Him. This is what baptism means – living our lives for Him which could be translated as giving up our lives for Him. Today, the baptism of our Lord, reminds us of this and our unique destiny as children of God.