

hasn't done himself. Second, by going down into the waters of the Jordan, he sanctifies the waters of the whole world, to make them fitting for his own life-giving sacrament of baptism, which he gives to us through the Church. John's baptism was in fact more like the ritual washing of the Qumran monks, not the full sacrament of baptism which Jesus instituted.

Application

One of the great strengths of the Catholic Church is its sense of history. Our faith goes all the way back to the time of Jesus and John the Baptist. It goes back to the monks of Qumran, to Elijah and Elisha, to Joshua, Moses and Abraham, who all believed in the divine Messiah, the one who was coming into the world.

Many of their adventures took place in and around the Holy Land. Moses led the people as far as the Jordan, and Joshua led them through it to enter the promised land. Elijah was taken up from Elisha beside the Jordan. This is one of the reasons Jesus goes there to be baptised: the Jordan stands between the desert and the promised land.

That symbolism is continued in the sacrament of baptism: through it we share the same faith as these ancient figures. Sacramentally, we cross the Jordan, go down into the Jordan with Christ, leaving the desert of this world, so that we can one day enter the promised land of heaven. Physically, of course, we still live in the world, in this desert. But we too can prepare a way for the Lord, by living out our baptismal vows, by letting Christ feed us in this desert with himself as heavenly food, by working with Christ to establish his kingdom of peace and justice. At his baptism in the Jordan, Jesus sums up all that history of salvation, and begins his public mission of preaching the kingdom. He passed that mission on to the apostles and the whole Church, and we carry on that mission today.