



# Stronica Proboszcza

## The Pastor's Page

January 13<sup>th</sup>, MMXIX

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

*Month of the Holy Name*

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### Niech będzie pochwalony Jezus Chrystus! Praised be Jesus Christ!

Liturgically speaking Christmas is officially over. But culturally and ethnically speaking we continue to celebrate this joyful time of year. The continual Christmas beauty of our church reflects the happiness we feel at this *party-oriented, pre-Lent, Carnival* time of year! The visitors continue to come and find an oasis of *Holiday* in our lovely church!

I do hope many people will come by during these joy-filled days and see our church at its best! Don't forget to invite your family, friends, neighbors and relatives to this purpose! On Sunday, January 27<sup>th</sup>, at the 12:00 noon Mass, we will observe our final Christmas-oriented celebration as we remember the Presentation of the Lord, with the blessing of candles and a special procession. This will be the last chance to sing our beloved Polish kolędy in church as we gaze on the Christ child in His manger bed. Don't miss it!

When Advent began, back in December, we heard the words of the Prophet Isaiah: "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!" Today God answers this prayer. Jesus goes into the Jordan River to be baptized by St. John. Suddenly the skies do open! God's Holy Spirit comes down in the form of a dove. Then God speaks for everyone to hear: "This is my beloved Son."

In the fifth century, Bishop Maximus of Turin wrote that we have every reason to celebrate this day with the joy of Christmas: "At Jesus' birth His mother Mary held her child close to her heart. So, today the Father holds His beloved Son for all people to adore. Jesus is baptized so all Christians may follow Him with confidence."

In Hebrew the name of Jesus is Joshua. This name means Savior. A thousand years before the time of Jesus, in the days of the Exodus, after Moses died a man named Joshua became the leader of the Hebrew people. Joshua led the people through the Jordan River and into the Promised Land.

Our Savior Jesus is a new Joshua. Jesus leads us into the *Jordan of Baptism*. We pass through the holy waters of the baptismal font to enter a new life. In the holy Sacrament of Baptism we become the Children of God.

The baptism of Jesus was a dramatic turning point in his life. Jesus was about 30 years old, and had spent his whole life in the obscurity of a small hill town up north called Nazareth. He worked as a carpenter; in the eyes of the townspeople he was just like everybody else. After his

baptism, Jesus put aside whatever dreams he might have had of a quiet life as a carpenter. He would show us a new way to live. He would show us a new way to die – with trust in God. His decision was not without struggle. Right after his baptism he faced the temptation to take a different path, but he fought it off and lived the life he was called to live.

Tomorrow we begin ordinary time and from a liturgical perspective we close the Christmas season. But as we close one door we open another door to the rest of the liturgical year still lying before us filled with encounters with our Lord Jesus. This Jesus calls to us once again today, “Come, follow me.”

In our church there is a beautiful stained glass window on the south or street side, second from the vestibule, depicting the baptism of the Lord. In it, the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, can be seen hovering over St. John and Jesus as water is poured over our Lord’s head. St. John holds a staff that has a banner attached to it reading: Ecce Agnus Dei – Behold the Lamb of God. The Window is inscribed “ofiarował Jan Tomczak” or offered by John Tomczak.

## The Beauty of Baptism

*As the sick man comes out of the bath newly strengthened, so does the soul come forth from Baptism not only purified from sin, but strengthened in grace and endowed with the sonship of God. Every one who is born again in holy Baptism, is as it were, cut off from Adam, the sinful vine-stock, and grafted as a new branch to the living tree, who is Christ Jesus, that he may bloom and bear fruit for eternal life. It is for the soldier a most sacred duty to observe faithfully and bravely the oath of allegiance. Remember! Thou too, in Baptism hast registered a vow to God, the just and eternal. How will it fare with thee, if thou become a perjurer before God, the Lord, and desert thy colors?*

As we think of the Lord Jesus’ baptism on this feast day, it would be good to consider our own baptism for a moment. To recall that day, which for the greater number of us, took place when we were just a baby. How our parents lovingly carried us in their arms to the parish church. How our family gathered around the font of that church, as in our name, our godparents made our baptismal promises for us and the waters of baptism were gently poured over our infant heads by the parish priest. How we were anointed with the chrism or oil of salvation and clothed in a pure white garment. And a candle was lit in our name from the Easter candle, symbolizing the faith that was now present in our hearts, always to remain there! It is true that Jesus’ baptism was different from ours in so much as He had no original sin upon His soul to be forgiven, but these baptisms are the same in so far as being a moment when God the Father proclaims us to be His child as He proclaimed Jesus that day at the Jordan River to be His Son.

Every year we are asked to renew our baptismal promises at Easter. Think on them for a moment today: Do you renounce sin, so as to live in the freedom of the children of God? Do you renounce the lure of evil, so that sin may have no mastery over you? Do you renounce Satan, the author and prince of sin? Are we living a life faithful to these vows, spoken long ago in our lives, that were ratified when we received the Sacrament of Confirmation, and are renewed each year at the joy of Easter? It is good to take a moment and think about these things. “Where was I baptized and when? Who was the priest who did this great thing for me? Perhaps to say a prayer for that priest. To also whisper a prayer of thanksgiving for my parents who loved me enough to make certain I was baptized and for my godparents who made themselves available for this important task. And most of all give thanks to God for making me His child in the Sacrament of Baptism!

## Carols, Koledy & Pastoralki

In English the word carol refers to any type of Christmas song, both those that focus on the birth of Christ and those that simply express the secular delights of the season, like Santa Claus, Reindeer, Snowmen, etc. In Polish it is safe to say that ALL Christmas music has the birth of Jesus as its theme. Polish Christmas music however is divided into two distinct categories. Koledy are Christmas hymns that are appropriate for use in church and elsewhere. Pastoralki are Christmas folk songs strictly speaking not appropriate for use in church but rather popular among outdoor carolers and at Christmas parties.

Pastoralki are often associated with shepherds and country folk. They are purely Polish and include country scenes, sad and joyful scenes or even amusing one. The poor, homeless little Jesus surrounded by cattle and animals finds shelter among the simple people.

These folk songs consist of Polish scenery, Polish names, Polish food and Polish dress. Although they are not based on the Holy Land where the Messiah was born, you can feel in them something from the Psalms, the sincerity of a child's prayer, or the wisdom of patriarchs. Many are written to the melodies of the Mazur and Krakowiak.

Koledy and Pastoralki are small portions of the Polish spirit. They say that prayer is a conversation with God. A carol is also a prayer in simple words. For it is based on the truth of Jesus Christ's birth. Let us sing them frequently, lovingly from our hearts.

### Hej Koleda! Koleda!

Polish Christmas Carols are sung until the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February. The Christmas season, for the Polish people, starts on Christmas Eve. Advent is Advent – a time of preparation and anticipation. Unlike many Western cultures, where Christmas carols and celebrations begin by December 1<sup>st</sup>, the Polish people spend that time in prayerful waiting. The time after Christmas is the time for celebration.

Unlike the Christmas songs of other countries the Polish carol, called a koleda, is not only a prayer but it is also a story – a kind of musical drama telling of the miraculous birth of Jesus. These koledy are a musical expression of genius and profound religious conviction. Many Polish carols date from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and reflect, not only the folk culture of the day, but the royal and courtly life of the nobility.

The word koleda is taken from the Latin word meaning the first day of the month and reflects the ancient custom of pre-Christian feasts in mid-winter. With the coming of Christianity, the theme became the birth of Jesus.

Many of the koledy are based on the majestic Polonez, a royal and stately dance from the courts of Polish kings. One such koleda, "W Żłobie Leży" was based on the Polonez played at the coronation of King Władysław IV (1632-1648).

Adam Mickiewicz, in writing about the beauty of Polish Christmas carols, said: "I doubt whether there is another country which can boast of such a collection of carols as Poland has. It would not be easy to find any other nation's poetry with feelings so pure, of such an extreme sweetness and delicacy."

***"I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year!"***

***Ebenezer Scrooge***

# Kolędownie, Caroling and Pastoral Home Visits

In previous articles it has been mentioned that the cultural life of Poland and other Catholic countries differs somewhat from the culture and customs of the United States especially in the observance of Christmas. In those cultures Advent is Advent and is not a time of indulging in the delights that belong by right to the joyful season of Christmas. And so things like Christmas parties and caroling just don't take place before the 25<sup>th</sup> day of December. Rather Christmas Day is the first day of a more authentic Christmas Season which last for forty days until February 2<sup>nd</sup>. Actually this is the same amount of time practically speaking that Americans begin getting in the Christmas mood, as forty days before Christmas day is mid November.

And so, it all begins on the second day of Christmas, as Christmas Day itself is a stay at home with family day. Carolers set out on St. Stephen's Day, December 26<sup>th</sup> to bring the joy of the season to their neighbors and friends in song. Kolędownie is the Polish word for caroling just as kolęda is the word for a carol. When a group of carolers show up at your door the fun begins, as they always expect a reward for their singing. This is the time of year when delicious foods are plentiful and "warming drinks" are also most willingly accepted! You can imagine after visiting all the homes in one's neighborhood how caroling could become a very joyful time for all involved!

There is however a more official and serious kind of kolędownie that also takes place at this time of year. On the feast of the Three Kings or Epiphany, the priests at the end of Mass bless chalk and holy water to be used during pastoral home visits that take place annually at this time of year. Every home and family in the parish is visited by the priests of the parish once a year at Christmas time.

Actually the blessing of water on the feast of the Epiphany is a very old tradition coming from the Eastern Church. There the Church has long emphasized in her celebration of the Epiphany the mystery of our Lord's baptism, and by analogy our baptism. Although the Western Church concentrates on the visit of the Magi on the Epiphany it has long blessed special water on the day. This water is taken home by the faithful and used throughout the year, especially when the priest comes to bless the house.

When the priest visits a home in the parish, he begins with the greeting, "Peace be to this house. And to all that dwell here in." Prayers are then said including always the Our Father. The house is then sprinkled with holy water and all present kiss the crucifix which has been placed on a table covered with a white cloth and on which are two lighted candles. Then, if he has not already done so, the father of the family inscribes the door with the chalk blessed in church. Finally the priest takes some time to gather and update family information and to speak with the family about any of their concerns.

From a logical perspective it does make more sense to celebrate the birthday of baby after he is born than before. Of course doing things in this logical way requires a Christian to go against the prevailing culture so as to cultivate something that is more in line with our faith both liturgically and spiritually. January becomes a very cold and dull month without the joy that Christmas brings. Everything ends on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February when the Church celebrates the feast of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple, which is the last mention in the Sacred Scriptures of Our Savior as a little baby. In Poland Christmas trees, and nativity scenes remain in churches and homes until this day and the beautiful carols of Christmas can also be heard.