

January 13, 2019

Baptism of the Lord

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

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After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Background:

Throughout their history, the Jews looked for the coming of a Messiah who would establish the Reign of God. There were those who thought that perhaps John the Baptist was God's anointed who had finally come. In the first line of the gospel text, Luke acknowledges that fact. Luke then quotes John's denial of being the "anointed one." The Baptist, without naming Jesus, then points to one who is to come, and compares his own standing to that of the true Messiah. ("I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals.") Washing the feet of another was the task of the very lowest servants. It was also a gesture of respect, that of a student for his master. John uses this image in comparing himself to the one who is truly God's anointed. John is saying that he is not even worthy to be the student of the Messiah.

In the last two verses of the text, Luke first describes the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus, and then the Father confirming that Jesus is indeed His son. Luke's description of these events is different from the other Gospels, in that Luke presents these events as happening after John had finished baptizing. Luke describes Jesus as being at prayer when he experiences the appearance of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, and the voice from heaven. These are experiences that happen to him, not things that happen by him or through him. Luke's description also removes any sense of John's involvement in the experience.

Luke's recording that the Father's voice confirmed that Jesus was his son was very significant for the people of the day. Their limited understanding of reproduction made it impossible for them to know who the actual father of any child was. Therefore, the father had to publicly state that he was the father of a child. By doing this, he was giving the child legitimacy, status in the community, and the right to an inheritance, and he was taking on the responsibility of being the child's father. This was a critical part of the social structure of the day. Using this social institution, Luke presents God as claiming that Jesus is His Son.

Reflection Questions:

1. Can you recall a time when your parents let you know that they were pleased with you? What do you remember about that day?
2. Can you recall a time when you were filled with expectation?
3. What are your expectations for God's involvement in your life, or in the world?
4. When you think of the Jewish people waiting for generations and generations for a Messiah...

5. Imagine that you were one of the others that came that day to be baptized by John, and you witnessed in some way Jesus' experience. What thoughts and feelings would be going through you?
6. Do you sense that God looks on you as God's beloved son/daughter?
7. Can you talk to God now about your own sense of being beloved, your hopes and expectations for God, the ways you would like to point to the presence of God in the world, or some other feeling that might have arisen in this gospel text?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

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Excerpts from the readings for January 13, 2019, Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

In year C of the liturgical cycle, the Lectionary has multiple choices for 1st and 2nd readings on this feast.

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Thus says the Lord: Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations, not crying out, not shouting, not making his voice heard in the street.

a bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench, until he establishes justice on the earth; the coastlands will wait for his teaching.

I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.

Or Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated; indeed, she has received from the hand of the Lord double for all her sins.

A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the Lord!

Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!

Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together; for the Lord has spoken. Go up on to a high mountain, Zion, herald of glad tidings; cry out at the top of your voice, Jerusalem, herald of good news!

Fear not to cry out and say to the cities of Judah: Here is your God! Here comes with power the Lord God, who rules by a strong arm; here is his reward with him, his recompense before him. Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.

Psalm 29:1-4, 9-10

The Lord will bless his people with peace.

Give to the Lord glory and praise, you sons of God,

Give to the Lord the glory due his name; adore the Lord in holy attire.

The voice of the Lord is over the waters, the Lord, over vast waters.

The voice of the Lord is mighty; the voice of the Lord is majestic.

The God of glory thunders, and in his temple all say, "Glory!"

The Lord is enthroned above the flood as king forever.

Or Psalm 104:1-4, 24-30

O bless the Lord, my soul. O Lord, my God, you are great indeed!

you are clothed with majesty and glory, robed in light as with a cloak.

You have spread out the heavens like a tent-cloth;

You have constructed your palace upon the waters.

You make the clouds your chariot; you travel on the wings of the wind.

You make the winds your messengers, and flaming fire your ministers.

How manifold are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you have wrought them all--

the earth is full of your creatures; the sea also, great and wide,

in which are schools without number of living things both small and great.

They look to you to give them food in due time. When you give it to them, they gather it; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

If you take away their breath, they perish and return to the dust.

When you send forth your spirit, they are created,

and you renew the face of the earth.

Acts 10:34-38

Peter proceeded to speak to those gathered, saying: "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality.

Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him. You know the word that he sent to the Israelites as he proclaimed peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all, what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him."

Or Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

The grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age, as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people as his own, eager to do what is good. When the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, He saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

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