

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD
JANUARY 10, 2021**

SCRIPTURES:

**Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7
Acts 10:34-38
Mark 1:7-11**

**God's servant will bring sight to the blind.
God has anointed Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah and Lord.
Jesus is the beloved Son of the Father.**

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the three Scripture passages given in the Lectionary for this weekend. Begin with the Gospel since the other readings are always chosen in terms of the Gospel reading. (The second reading does not always have the same theme as the Gospel and the first reading. The first reading will be directly related to the Gospel in its content.) Repeat the Gospel reading. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the faith community and does not necessarily answer any questions which an individual may have. We simply ask, "What message does the Church (or this faith-sharing group or this family) need to hear?" We listen to the word with that question in mind.

Mark 1:7-11:

In this first chapter, Mark continues to develop the theme of his Gospel already announced in the title: Jesus is the Christ, Son of God. From the title (1:1) to the end (15:39), that is the unique proclamation: "Jesus, the Christ, Son of God," in the title; "Truly, this man was the Son of God," uttered by the Roman centurion after Jesus' death. This is the literary device called an *inclusio*. These two proclamations *frame* everything in between. The whole book is about one thing: Jesus Christ, Son of God. When a whole document is *framed* by such words, they must surely be the most important, setting the theme, giving the whole content in summary form.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, Son of God is used to designate angels (in the Book of Job), the nation of Israel itself (in Exodus and Hosea), and individuals, especially the king (in Isaiah, Wisdom, Sirach, and 2 Samuel [2 Samuel 7:14]). It took a long time, even in Christian times, for the Church to settle on a definitive and unique interpretation of this title: that Jesus Christ embodies the very person of God, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, the Word made flesh. By itself, outside the whole context of the remainder of the New Testament, the expression "Son of God" does not prove that Jesus is God. It takes the rest of Christian revelation, and the interpretation given by the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to come to that conclusion. The point I make is that the Church does believe that Jesus Christ is Son of God in the sense of consubstantial with the Father and with the Holy Spirit, but the Church does not prove this point of doctrine from these expressions alone.

Mark reveals the true identity of Jesus to the Church. Jesus is Messiah / King. Jesus is the Spirit-filled servant of the Lord. The "epiphany," which is made manifest at the baptism of Jesus appears to be addressed only to himself, in the Gospel of Mark. The final "epiphany" can take place only after Jesus will have suffered and died. That will be a constant fact in Mark's Gospel: only in

suffering and in dying will Jesus be revealed as the son of God. Whenever there is an attempt to make Jesus a great leader, Mark always interjects that he has to die!

Isaiah:

The Book of Isaiah contains four “Servant Songs.” This is the first. (Others are: 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13 – 53:12.) The ideal Servant of the Lord in Israel. When Israel is led to be the Messiah, it will truly be the Servant. The Servant sums up all the desirable attributes of God’s people. In this Song, the Servant is depicted as one who would represent a highly placed court official. His mission and courtly style are described: With gentleness the Servant will bring justice. That is, he will bring the people into a covenant relationship with God and with one another. Through him, the Covenant of old will be extended to all nations, particularly to the oppressed. The Christian community has read into this prophecy the name of Jesus, especially in baptism accounts. Notice that even without a Christian application, this passage already prophesies that Gentiles will be invited to become part of the Chosen.

Acts:

The Book of Acts often reconstructs certain sermons given by the apostles, particularly Peter and Paul. Here, we are given a sermon uttered by Peter at the baptism of Cornelius, the Gentile, and his family. The early Christian community struggled mightily to accept the practice that Gentiles would be welcomed at the Table of the Eucharist. Would not the Jewish Christians be rendered unclean by such table fellowship with Gentiles? Peter declares that nothing is unclean if God makes it clean. Notice the allusion to the washing of baptism. Even before Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles, Peter was already practicing the inclusion of Gentiles in Christian baptism and communal fellowship. We need to pay attention to the sermons given by Peter and Paul in the Acts of the Apostles. These are always summaries of what the Church believes and teaches.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do you apply the reading about Jesus’ baptism to your own status as a *baptized* person? Are you aware that God has come personally to claim you as a *favored* person, as beloved *son / daughter*? Discuss what this all means for each one of us. What are some of the implications of all this? Are we not called to a special sense of our dignity and worth in God’s eyes? How can we respond to these facts concretely and practically?

2. Although innocent of all sin, Jesus received baptism from John. What does this have to say about us who receive baptism while still far from God after our human birth (Original Sin)? Do you see in our baptism the *unmerited gift* and grace from God that causes us to become like Jesus in the eyes of God? Explore the consequence of our gift of baptism. What are some of the elements of our Christian calling that flow from our baptism? What should our commitments be all about in this world since we have been baptized?

3. Take a look at the catechumens and candidates for full communion in your parish again this year. Are you not amazed that God is still calling a large number of adults and school-aged children to baptism and to renewal of baptism? In this day and age, when so many are abandoning the practices of the faith they received in baptism among us, some new ones are coming to take their places. What is God up to?

PRAYER

**Almighty, eternal God,
when the Spirit descended upon Jesus
at his baptism in the Jordan
You revealed him as your own beloved Son.
Keep us, your children born of water and the Spirit,
Faithful to our calling.
we ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen**

“Opening prayer from the Sacramentary for the “Baptism of the Lord”

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Baptism introduces us into the fellowship of God’s people that is the Church by shaping our inner selves into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Just as the Spirit hovered over the waters at Creation and brought forth life, so now, the same Spirit hovers over the waters of baptism and brings forth the life of Christ in us, a new creation.

The waters, the Spirit, and new life: these are the images in that scene of Creation in the Book of Genesis; these are the same images that shape our spiritual existence in the tradition of Christian baptism. We are not dealing with empty images here. We have the power of the Spirit of God at work in and through the signs that God has chosen.

The life of the Risen Christ is created in us by the power of the Holy Spirit in our baptism. The sacrament has a real effect. It is not just a sign of our personal faith. By baptism, we are made part of the Body of Christ, which is the community of faith.

The primary symbol at work in baptism is the community itself. The Church is gathered by the Holy Spirit and consecrated into being a holy instrument of sacrament, to immerse others into the dying and rising of Christ, to proclaim eternal life. The fundamental sign present at every baptism is the Church itself, sign of the eternal kingdom gathered by the Spirit into Christ.

Baptism cannot be equated with magic: secret words said by a priest which will make a child holy! Baptism is much more than that. It is a sacred event through which we are initiated into a community, which is the body of Christ, the people of God, with a sacred destiny and a holy purpose.

What is the mission of the Christian in the world? Just to avoid sin and remain pure and uncontaminated by the world? Surely not! The Church knows that it has been called to be a light to the world in which it lives, a leaven in the dough, a salt which gives flavor to all things. With Isaiah, we believe that we, too, must do what the Servant was sent to do: to bring forth justice. Justice in the Bible means a relationship of harmony and peace with God and with one another. It is the result of grace, God’s gift which restores the harmony first intended at creation. God’s Covenant is the model of justice. We surrender to God, accepting God’s love and guidance; God becomes our God, directing all aspects of our lives. Our relationships with one another are molded by the same Covenant model: given and dedicated to one another for the sake of the Lord. Reaching beyond the boundaries of our usual contacts, we will bring Covenant relationships to others with love and peace. The Church exists to go beyond itself.

See: The Catechism: #1213-1345

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