

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD  
IN  
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY**

**THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD  
January 9, 2022**

**SCRIPTURES:**

**Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7** God’s servant will bring sight to the blind.  
**Acts 10:34-38** God has anointed Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah and Lord.  
**Luke 3:15-16, 21-22** 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 that 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.*

**SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:**

**Luke:**

Luke structures this scene of the baptism of Jesus and the appearance of the message from God in parallel with the scene of the Annunciation when God is present in the overshadowing of the Virgin [the *cloud* that hovered over the Covenant tent in the Exodus story {Exodus 40:35}] (Luke 1:35). God speaks of *favor* coming upon Mary and upon Jesus and upon all persons of goodwill (Luke 2:14).

In the early Church, and in Luke’s community also, it seemed to have been important to proclaim clearly that John the Baptist was subordinate to Jesus. There is some evidence even in the canonical Scriptures that some of John’s disciples had not gone over to Jesus after the death of their leader, even a generation after all these events (Acts 19:3). The enduring appeal of John is attested to by all the Gospels; *yet, Jesus is the Messiah, not John!* John is pictured as purposefully calling the people to follow Jesus and not himself. He is only the prophet who points out the One who is sent by God (Luke 3:15-16). The Church purposefully keeps those two verses in the proclamation of Jesus’ baptism, even though the Lectionary omits the verses about the “winnowing fan” and about Herod’s hostility to John (Luke 3:17-20).

John the Baptist surely must have been an impressive person. People could not help but

pay attention to him -- the mighty and the humble alike. His garments (robe of *camel's hair* with a *leather* belt around his waist) clearly called attention to the Prophet Elijah who was to return to earth before the coming of the Messiah (2 Kings 1:8). Matthew even has Jesus say that John was indeed Elijah (Matthew 11:11-14). Even though Jesus is baptized by John, Luke goes to great length to make it clear that Jesus is the Messiah, not John. He offers two testimonies: The *Spirit* in the appearance of the dove and the *Father* speaking from on high (Luke 3:22).

Luke wants us to know that each one of us, as disciples of Jesus, also has the Spirit resting on us and God's favor bestowed to us by adoption.

### **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 is 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 own 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 consequences 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-age children to baptism and to renewal of baptism? In this day and age, when so many among us are abandoning the practices of the faith they received in baptism, 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, forever 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, which 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, the 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 or 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 that 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 the 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 that 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 that 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** #1213-1245

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