

Sunday, January 8, 2023 – Baptism of Our Lord

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Introduction

In the waters of the Jordan, Jesus is revealed as the beloved Son of God. Through this great epiphany, Jesus fulfills all righteousness and becomes the servant of God who will bring forth justice and be a light to the nations. In the waters of baptism we too are washed by the Word, anointed by the Spirit, and named God's beloved children. Our baptismal mission is to proclaim good news to all who are oppressed or in need of God's healing.

Prayer of the Day

O God our Father, at the baptism of Jesus you proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Make all who are baptized into Christ faithful to their calling to be your daughters and sons, and empower us all with your Spirit, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Isaiah 42:1-9

God's servant is endowed with God's spirit in order to bring justice to the nations. The servant will not exercise authority boisterously or with violence, nor will weariness ever prevent the fulfilling of the servant's task. God's old promises have been fulfilled; the servant's new assignment is to bring light to the nations.

¹Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.

²He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;

³a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.

⁴He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

⁵Thus says God, the LORD,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it

and spirit to those who walk in it:

⁶I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;

I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,

⁷to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

⁸I am the LORD, that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.

⁹See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.

Psalm 29

¹Ascribe to the | LORD, you gods,
ascribe to the LORD glo- | ry and strength.

²**Ascribe to the LORD the glory | due God's name;
worship the LORD in the beau- | ty of holiness.**

³The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; the God of | glory thunders;
the LORD is upon the | mighty waters.

⁴**The voice of the LORD is a pow- | erful voice;
the voice of the LORD is a | voice of splendor.**

⁵The voice of the LORD breaks the | cedar trees;
the LORD breaks the ce- | dars of Lebanon;

⁶**the LORD makes Lebanon skip | like a calf,
and Mount Hermon like a | young wild ox.**

⁷The voice | of the LORD
bursts forth in | lightning flashes.

⁸**The voice of the LORD | shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilder- | ness of Kadesh.**

⁹The voice of the LORD makes the oak trees writhe and strips the | forests bare.
And in the temple of the LORD all are | crying, "Glory!"

¹⁰**The LORD sits enthroned a- | bove the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king for- | evermore.**

¹¹O LORD, give strength | to your people;
give them, O LORD, the bless- | ings of peace.

Second Reading: Acts 10:34-43

Peter crosses the sharp religious boundary separating Jews from Gentiles and proclaims the good news of God's inclusive forgiveness in Jesus' name to Cornelius, a Roman centurion. As a result of Peter's preaching, Cornelius and his family become the first Gentiles to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

³⁴Peter began to speak to [Cornelius and his household]: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Gospel: Matthew 3:13-17

Before Jesus begins his ministry, he is baptized by John, touched by the Spirit, and identified publicly as God's child.

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Prayers of Intercession

Called together to follow Jesus, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need, saying “Merciful God,” and responding, “receive our prayer.”

A brief silence.

Calling God, you speak with power to your church. Open our hearts and minds to the new things you are declaring. Strengthen bishops, pastors, deacons, lay leaders, and teachers of the faith. Equip the baptized for your reconciling and redeeming work. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Renewing God, you provide the waters of the earth and in Jesus’ baptism you reveal the waters of life. Cleanse and protect oceans, rivers, and watersheds (*local water sources may be named*). Bring relief to parched lands and to communities without access to safe water. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Righteous God, you never weary of establishing justice. Increase cooperation and constructive dialogue between nations. Guide local, national, and international authorities to govern with equity, vision, and integrity. We pray for those in military service, for peacemakers, and for our enemies. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Abiding God, your mercy is steadfast. Give sanctuary to people who flee from oppression, war, poverty, and famine. Sustain health care workers, caregivers, first responders, counselors, and all who help and heal. Comfort those who are grieving or experiencing crisis (*especially*). Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Blessing God, in Christ you gather the beloved community. Kindle the gifts of your Spirit in your people. Accompany the newly baptized, those recently ordained, and any beginning a new ministry. Inspire synodical leaders and congregational councils to serve with imagination and wisdom. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Promising God, your faithfulness endures throughout all generations. We give thanks for those who have died in Christ, trusting that we will be united with them and all the saints in Christ’s resurrection life. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We bring to you our needs and hopes, O God, trusting your wisdom and power revealed in Christ crucified.

Amen.

A reflection for this Baptism of Our Lord Sunday...

The Power of a God Who Is Humble

From the time Jesus first presented himself for baptism by John until today, Christians have puzzled over why Jesus had to be baptized. The act of baptism was understood to be an act of repentance and the cleansing of one's sins. John does not understand why Jesus, whose sandals John is "not worthy to carry" (Matt. 3:11) should seek to be baptized. Instead, John declares to Jesus, "I need to be baptized by you" (Matt. 3:14). Why should the Son of God, who is without sin, need to be baptized?

Frederick Dale Bruner, in *Matthew: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), says that he considers Jesus' first miracle to have occurred at his baptism. The miracle is that Jesus was humble. The divine Son of God humbles himself by allowing John to baptize him. This act of humility is an act of obedience to God and solidarity with all humankind. Jesus has no sins to be forgiven. However, for us, he goes down to the river of repentance with all the other sinners to be baptized. Jesus' baptism, his first adult act as recorded in Matthew's gospel, gives us a clear indication of how Jesus will act for his entire life. The Son of God will come down with us, on our level, identifying with our needs. His baptism, then, foreshadows how his life will end, on the cross. In his death, Jesus experiences the worst we could ever experience as mortal humans. But, because Jesus united with us in baptism, we are united with him in both his death and resurrection. The barriers that separate us from God, including the barriers of sinfulness, mortality, and death, are broken by Jesus' obedience to God, through his humility to come down to us in the depths of our humanity.

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