



THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Year A

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10

Acts 10:34-38

Matthew 3:13-17

Gathering

(An unlit candle, a pair of running shoes or sneakers, and a small clear glass bowl of water rest on a table covered with a green cloth.)

In today's Gospel, we read about the profound religious experience Jesus had at the river Jordan. When being baptized by John, Jesus became newly and deeply aware of his Father's love for him and what his mission was to be. Last week, we reflected on the experience of the magi and their being guided by the light of the star to Jesus. How did you allow the light of Christ show you the path through this past week?

Prayer

(The candle is lit. The bowl of water is passed so that members may use the water to sign themselves with the sign of the cross. When the water is returned to the table, the leader places the shoes on the floor in the midst of the community and says, "Baptism calls us to walk in the way of the Lord, to extend his mission." The community pauses in silent union with the Lord and his mission. After a time of quiet, the prayer continues as follows.)

Member: You have been told, O mortal, what is good,
and what the LORD requires of you:
Only to do justice and to love goodness,
and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8

Leader: O Lord, You do not ask us to do anything that is impossible, but you do ask us to promote justice and peace, to live in simplicity, to live in right relationship with others. Strengthen us with your love to follow you and to share in your mission.

All: Amen.

(A selection of instrumental music is played.)

HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)

When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two questions: "What draws you to this gospel?" "Where do you resist this gospel?" The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)

Reflection

In the gospel, Jesus is baptized by John even as John protests that he (John) should be the one baptized by Jesus. As John was baptizing Jesus, the heavens opened and we witness what is for Jesus a profound religious experience. He became aware in a new way that his heavenly Father was very pleased with him, that he belonged to God as his Son, and that it was now time to begin his mission.

And this is what Jesus did. He began to go from town to town preaching the good news and performing wondrous acts and deeds of deliverance. His baptism inaugurated his mission and he embraced it whole-heartedly.

The disciples initially felt that their mission was to the Jewish people, but after the resurrection it became clear to them that God is the God of all mankind, not just the Israelites. “[I]n every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.” This is what Peter realized in today’s second reading, when he visited the home of the Gentile, Cornelius. This was a true epiphany for Peter. It opened the way to what has become our worldwide mission to embrace all in the name of God.

Our baptism is meant to draw us into this global awareness, namely, that we are, in effect, now a world-wide community of believers and doers called to an inclusive embrace of humanity. As members of the God-loving community which is the church we are opened up through our baptism to an expansive, not restrictive understanding of God’s love. In living out our baptismal call to a wide embrace, we *sacramentalize* in our actions our belief that God is the God of all people. It is all about treating all people with respect, dignity and love. This is the mission of Jesus. This is our mission.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ Recall a baptism you attended that moved you. What did you experience at the time? How did it impact you?
- ◆ Recall a time when you knew in your bones that you were accepted, loved by God.
- ◆ How do you understand what vocation, God’s calling, has meant in your life over the years?
- ◆ How strong a sense do you have of being called to actively share in Jesus’ mission to the world?
- ◆ How open are your arms to accept and embrace people of all kinds in the world around you?

HEARING THE GOSPEL’S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: “What do you want to hold on to for

yourself from this session?” “How are you/we being called to live in response to God’s word?” After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions

- ◆ Include someone in your life whom you have excluded by simply initiating a conversation with him/her.
- ◆ There are any number of *nameless* people we see and somehow interact with on a regular basis. These are often clerks or cashiers or other service personnel. The next time you encounter these people, deliberately ask their names. Begin to address them by name on a continuing basis.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: “What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?” “What do you say to him in response?” The community pauses for a full five minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.

Members join in singing, “When Jesus Comes to Be Baptized.” It may be found on the Internet.)

Leader: O Lord, help us to be ever vigilant in carrying out your mission to proclaim the good news to the world and to bring healing to those who are suffering. Make us

ever aware that our actions are more important than our words, and that it is our responsibility to help bring all things into the kingdom of God, under Christ. Give us the strength to carry on when times are tough. We give you thanks, Lord, for providing us with a faith community that supports us in our journey toward the kingdom of justice and peace.

All: Glory be to the Father
 and to the Son,
 and to the Holy Spirit,
 As it was in the beginning,
 is now
 and ever shall be,
 world without end. Amen.

(Members exchange a sign of peace.)