



BAPTISM OF THE LORD

CYCLE C

Isaiah 42:1–4, 6–7
Acts 10:34–38
Luke 3:15–16, 21–22

GATHERING

(An unlit candle stands alone on a cloth-covered table.)

Last week we reflected on the Epiphany surprise that God's love in Jesus is meant to include all people. With the completion of the Christmas celebration we move to re-orient ourselves to ordinary time. This week makes a great transition as we encounter Jesus as he prepares for his public ministry. *(The session begins with some conversation about how members witnessed to the all-inclusive nature of God's love in their lives this past week.)*

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.

All: Enkindle in us the fire of your love.

(The leader lights the candle and the community pauses for several minutes of silence. After a few minutes of quiet, the leader invokes the Holy Spirit again. The community again responds as above.)

Focus Question

To whom do you belong?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

Commentary

The baptism of the Lord? Already? We just celebrated Christmas! Isn't this just a bit abrupt? It is kind of, isn't it? And it probably feels even more so, if one is caught in a romanticized version of Christmas, Christmas as a merely nostalgic looking back at baby Jesus.

With a bit of a start then, this week's liturgy moves us on, challenges us to a still deeper encounter with the mystery of Christ and his mission.

The gospel scene, associated with the baptism of Jesus, is uniquely portrayed by Luke. The ministry of John, the baptizer, is featured at the outset, but the figure of John is completely separated out from narration about the baptism of Jesus. The event itself is only referred to as already having taken place. Luke presents a scene that centers on Jesus *at prayer* after having been baptized. It pictures a Jesus tuned to his God. God's Spirit comes to Jesus in his openness, and Jesus discovers himself claimed by God as God's own.

For the Christian, the notion of vocation has to do with being called by God. Discovering oneself being claimed by God means coming to realize that you belong to God in a way you belong to no one else. One discovers one's call as Jesus did, in prayer. Prayer is being *in the zone*. Prayer is openness, attentiveness, readiness for God's Spirit.

In the gospel Luke portrays John speaking of the baptism the messiah will bring as a baptism in the Holy Spirit and in fire. In Acts, Luke speaks of Jesus being anointed with the Holy Spirit and power. Identity and mission go together. God's Spirit claims and energizes.

Situated as it is in this week's liturgy, the reading from Isaiah spells out the mission of Jesus in terms of bringing God's justice to the nations. Curiously, while one might easily imagine the pursuit of justice being

energized by righteous anger, justice here is pursued with such a gentleness that, in its establishment, the bruised reed is not broken and the smoldering wick is not quenched.

This victory of justice for all, is a justice that liberates, a justice which gives sight to the blind, freedom to prisoners. These same images from Isaiah will be echoed again by Jesus himself in an upcoming gospel which will recall the inauguration of his ministry in Nazareth.

As for Jesus, so for the Christian. Identity and mission are two sides of the same coin. This liturgy calls us to prayer, to attentiveness to God, to God's claim, to God's call to pursue justice for all with gentleness. Who does God call you to be? What does God call you to do?

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

(The community pauses in silence for several minutes to ponder the scriptures and the questions which follow.)

1. What sense of vocation do you experience? Who does God call you to be? What does God call you to do?
2. Say something about your experience of prayer. How often do you pray? When do you pray? How do you pray?
3. When recently has your sense of God's claim on you moved you to act justly?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

Leader: In the light of our sharing of life and faith over the scripture for this week's liturgy, what does God ask of you, personally; what does God ask of us as a community?
(After an extended pause, the leader invites responses from the community.)

1. Have a conversation with some young person in your life this week. Invite him or her to explore what he/she feels called to

be/do? Invite him/her to consider what he/she can give back to others and God in gratitude for the gift of life.

2. Take advantage of an opportunity to network with a small church community in Africa. Sr. Rita Ishengoma of Geita Diocese, Tanzania, would gladly act as contact person for small church communities that would like to twin with small communities in her area. You may contact her as follows: Sr. Rita K. Ishengoma, Social Communication Office, Geita Diocese, P.O. Box 120, Geita, Tanzania.
3. Set aside twenty minutes for silence some day this week. Listen, be attentive to the God who claims you as his own, the one to whom you belong as to no one else.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: The Lord will bless his people with peace.

All: The Lord will bless his people with peace.

Leader: Give to the Lord, you sons of God, give to the Lord glory and praise.

All: The Lord will bless his people with peace.

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

All: The Lord will bless his people with peace.

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

All: The Lord will bless his people with peace.

Leader: The God of glory thunders, and in his temple all say, "Glory!" The Lord is enthroned above the flood; the Lord is enthroned as king forever.

All: The Lord will bless his people with peace.

(The leader calls for a few minutes of silence. Some quiet instrumental music is played. After the silence has settled in the leader prays: "Speak Lord, your servants listen." After several minutes of silence, the leader draws the quiet time to a close by inviting prayers of praise, thanksgiving and petition. Members respond to the invocations by praying, "Hear our prayer, O Lord.")

Leader: Hear these our prayers, O Lord. Claim us anew as your own. Help us to know ever more deeply that we belong to you as we belong to no other. Move us to act for justice. Bless us with your peace. In Jesus' name, through the one Spirit, we pray.

All: Amen.

