

FIRST READING: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:

Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated; indeed, she has received from the hand of the LORD double for all her sins. A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. Go up on to a high mountain, Zion, herald of glad tidings; cry out at the top of your voice, Jerusalem, herald of good news! Fear not to cry out and say to the cities of Judah: Here is your God! Here comes with power the Lord GOD, who rules by a strong arm; here is his reward with him, his recompense before him. Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 104:1b-2, 3-4, 24-25, 27-28, 29-30

***O bless the Lord, my soul.***

O LORD, my God, you are great indeed! you are clothed with majesty and glory, robed in light as with a cloak. You have spread out the heavens like a tent-cloth;

***O bless the Lord, my soul.***

You have constructed your palace upon the waters. You make the clouds your chariot; you travel on the wings of the wind. You make the winds your messengers, and flaming fire your ministers.

***O bless the Lord, my soul.***

How manifold are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you have wrought them all; the earth is full of your creatures; the sea also, great and wide, in which are schools without number of living things both small and great.

***O bless the Lord, my soul.***

They look to you to give them food in due time. When you give it to them, they gather it; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

***O bless the Lord, my soul.***

If you take away their breath, they perish and return to the dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.

***O bless the Lord, my soul.***

SECOND READING: Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to Titus:

Beloved: The grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age, as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people as his own, eager to do what is good. When the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, He saved us

through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

The people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ. John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

The Gospel of the Lord.

### **Reflection for the Baptism of Jesus**

What does baptism do as a sacrament? It is the first of the sacraments. Without it no one can receive another. It is the most important of the seven as well as the first. With baptism people become members of the Church. Baptism is one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church and is accepted as a sacrament by all Christian denominations. When we speak of the Church, it is the Church of Christ as he founded it, not as it is as we have made it. Jesus prayed that all would be one as he and the Father were one. In the hands of flawed and fallible people, the Church is divided and remains, as each of us, in need of the saving grace of God to lead it to become the Kingdom of God when Jesus returns.

Through baptism, we become God's beloved children, God's daughters and sons. We become beloved brothers and sisters of Jesus and with one another. At baptism we receive the gift of salvation and the promise of eternal life. Baptism is a sacrament of initiation. For adults, it is the culmination of the process of coming to faith in Jesus. It is a public recognition of their journey to faith and new life. The process that leads to baptism is lengthy and can take more than a year of instruction, formation and personal reflection. It is not just a personal process either. At several times those seeking baptism present themselves to the wider community as part of the liturgical celebration and preparations for their baptism at the Easter Vigil. The community recognizes their presence and affirms their journey for they seek membership within the community.

We also baptize infants. Their process of formation and education comes after baptism. They are raised within the context of their parents' faith. Coming to faith, which is to believe in God and in the one God sent, God's only begotten son Jesus, is both a gift from God and a process of maturation. Babies don't have any idea of what happens at baptism let alone choose it. Their life in Christ depends upon God's grace, their parents' commitment to faith and the witness that their parents show them. What can happen when the babies' parents bring them to church? Sometimes babies do not cooperate with people's expectations of behavior. Instead of

hearing crying and screaming babies, we can hear them praying, all be it at the top of their lungs and singing. If we listen carefully, they can be on key. Would that all people be able to raise their voices to God with such fervor. It depends a bit on perspective how we hear and accept them. They are not our future but our present. They are members of the Church just as we are.

Baptism, like all the seven sacraments, forgives sin. For adults who receive baptism this is clear. What about infants? They don't have much capacity to sin. We can also talk about human nature. We are all flawed, capable of mischief and full of deception of others and self. Baptism is a way to counter act our nature, by the grace of God. We can refer to the human condition as fallen and term it original sin. Baptism begins a movement, by the Holy Spirit, to draw us onto a path that leads to God. We won't get to God completely until we die.

We believe that God, through the one who baptizes, calls each person by name. When I was baptized, the rite was all in Latin. The priest called me by my name in that language; Jacobus Donaldus (James Donald). For centuries, the Church urged people to name their kids with the name of a saint. This had the practical purpose of being able to use existing Latin names since Latin hasn't been spoken as a living language in millennia. Using the person's name is critical. For through the minister of the sacrament, it is God's voice that speaks, not unlike God's voice spoken to Jesus when he was baptized.

I don't remember the day I was baptized. There are no photos of it since cameras were not allowed in churches in the early 1950s. I have photos of the family party afterward. I can't even remember the date of my baptism. There's a copy of my certificate in my childhood album, but that single event is not as significant as how I now live my life. Had it not been for that event, I would not have been ordained a priest and have served as one for a lifetime. In a real sense, I renew my baptism each day through my witness to faith. With a little introspection, I posit that all of us can renew our baptisms in a similar way. All of us have received the same baptism and call.

On the feast of Jesus' baptism what do we celebrate? It was, as scripture had put it, a baptism for the repentance of sin. Jesus was God and one of the perks of being God was that Jesus did not sin. He was perfect, unlike you and me. Why did Jesus seek baptism? As God he also had all the faith there is. Why would he need to be initiated into faith? There's something that we can miss; not seeing the forest for the trees. Jesus is God who chose to become a human being. The eternal, infinite, unconditional and almighty God who created the cosmos and keeps it running became one like us.

One like us. Jesus became a helpless infant. He couldn't talk, walk, change his diaper or feed himself. We forget the obviousness of this. He chose this as God. For Jesus to fulfill his mission, he had to take on our sins; becoming sin as it were. God chose our sins. Because of that, he would be arrested, tried, beaten and executed as a common criminal. Completely innocent, he would die, naked on a cross with a jeering crowd as witness. Through the degradation of the

cross, he took all our shame, weakness, sins and pain and died in our place. Through the events of Jesus' life God turned reality inside out. Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice to us.

That's what we don't often hear in Jesus' story. God chose what we choose to avoid; pain, shame and ruin. With Jesus' gory path, he entered his glory and brought us with him to it. Jesus brought us all into God. The verification of the gospel came at Easter when Jesus rose from his grave with the life he has shared with us now. We believe this and God's life is now ours to be perfected in eternal life in God's Kingdom.

Why did Jesus seek baptism by John in the Jordan? Baptism was the beginning of Jesus public life, mission and ministry. Unlike our Baptism, where God frees us from our sins, Jesus began the process to take on our sins that culminated in the cross that saved us. His initiation was into our lives. God became like us, not as a sinner but the one who would die for ours and in our place. Baptism was initiation into his life as Messiah, Son of God and our Savior.

It's always easy to see Jesus' nature as God in the gospels. He spoke with wisdom and power. He performed signs and miracles. He healed lepers. He gave people sight and hearing. He fed thousands with a few loaves and fish. He even raised the dead back to life. Yet today, we witness in the gospel Jesus' human nature. This is the point of the gospels; the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us.

What do we expect as a result of our faith and prayers? In the fractured world in which we live do we expect God to fix it all? For what do we hope? When Jesus fed the crowds not all the world's hungry were fed; only those gathered in Jesus presence ate. Neither did Jesus heal all the deaf and blind. Only a few did Jesus raise from the dead. What can this tell us of our expectations? We seek to know Jesus' divinity. Through his birth, life and death we come to know God's humanity.

When people met Jesus on the street, he looked like everyone else. He, in his human nature, was no more special than anyone else. The voice and dove, did anyone other than Jesus see or hear them? Luke doesn't tell us. If we seek Jesus divinity, we may believe that others did witness the dove and voice. If we seek Jesus humanity, perhaps it was his private experience of his Father's love and trust. Do we remember hearing our name at Baptism? We did hear it for here we are now, believing in Jesus. We have come to know God's presence within our lives. Would Jesus, as one like us, be much different?

We experience Jesus from a specific point of view and experience. John, the fellow pilgrims and the twelve disciples had a different experience. They knew Jesus before his cross and resurrection. Did they know what was to come? Did they recognize Jesus as God? He looked, acted and spoke like everyone else. He had no halo. Not everyone believed in him; even through his miracles. They expected the Messiah to be a king, someone who would stand out. John was one of the few who recognized who Jesus was. We live in a post Easter and post Pentecost world. We are members of a Church that did not exist. We believe in Jesus, the risen

Lord and savior. None of us can go back in time to the day of Jesus' baptism. Today's gospel was Jesus first movement toward the cross.

The baptism of Jesus began his mission that led to the cross. This is not the risen Lord. This is Jesus as he takes on our humanity. He joins us in our weakness. He takes on our sins. He guides us in faith to the Kingdom of his Father; yet to come.

May Jesus, as one like us, accompany us on our journey to the Father.

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