

Scripture Study

The Baptism of the Lord—Cycle C



Opening prayer

(Note: Several alternate First and Second Readings are possible for this feast day)

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

(Psalm 29:1-4, 9-10)

Acts 10:34-38

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

Overview of the Gospel:

- The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord marks the beginning of the liturgical season of Ordinary Time. We are now in the “C” cycle of readings, which means that for the remainder of this year (until next Advent season) our Sunday Gospels will be taken mostly from the Gospel of Luke.
- In this Sunday’s Gospel, we meet John the Baptist, who was sent as a *precursor* (or herald) of the Messiah, but who had developed a popular following by those who wondered if he might be the long anticipated Jewish Messiah. John, however, makes it clear he is not (see John 1:6-8, 19-28 and John 3:25-30).
- (Verses 17-20, omitted from this Sunday’s reading, describe John’s anticipatory ministry as one of calling the people to repentance by readying themselves for the coming of the Messiah, and also describe how John’s ministry came to an end.)
- When Jesus is baptized by John at the beginning of his public life, Jesus’ divinity is revealed and he is anointed for his mission in visible and audible signs.

Questions:

- Why do the people confuse John with Christ (verse 15; John 1:19-28)? By contrast, how does John differentiate himself and his ministry? How can you emulate John’s attitude in verse 16?
- Why was it necessary for Jesus to be baptized (Matthew 3:13-15; Mark 10:35-39; Luke 12:49-50; CCC 536)?
- Why did God choose this time to announce the presence of his Son (Luke 3:16-18; Acts 10:38)? Why was it necessary for that announcement to be audible (John 11:41-42)? How was this announcement pre-announced in the Old Testament (see First Reading)? How was it remembered later in the early Church (see Second Reading)?
- How significant is it that Jesus is praying right after his baptism and before the Spirit alights on him (verse 21. See New American Bible note on verses 21-22 and CCC 2600)?
- Do you remember to pray at important times in your life?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 536, 694, 696, 701, 2600

Closing prayer

Prayer is the best weapon we possess, the key that opens the heart of God.

—St. Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio)

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings found in the bulletin!

"He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire"

Scripture: *Luke 3:15-16, 21-22*

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the 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 Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Meditation: Do you want to be on fire for God? John the Baptist said that the Messiah would "baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Fire in biblical times was associated with God and with his action in the world and in the lives of his people. God sometimes manifested his presence by use of fire, such as the burning bush which was not consumed when God spoke to Moses (Exodus 3:2). The image of fire was also used to symbolize God's glory (Ezekiel 1:4, 13), his protective presence (2 Kings 6:17), his holiness (Deuteronomy 4:24), righteous judgment (Zechariah 13:9), and his wrath against sin (Isaiah 66:15-16). It is also used of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11 and Acts 2:3). God's fire both purifies and cleanses, and it inspires a reverent fear of God and of his word in us. Jesus came to give us the fire of his Spirit that we may radiate the



joy and truth of the gospel to a world in desperate need of God's light and truth. His word has power to change and transform our lives that we may be lights pointing others to Christ. Like John the Baptist, we too are called to give testimony to the light and truth of Jesus Christ. Do you want the Lord's power, grace, and love to burn brightly in your life? Ask him to fill you with his Holy Spirit.

John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3). Why did Jesus, the Sinless One, submit himself to John's baptism? In this humble submission we see a foreshadowing of the "baptism" of his bloody death upon the cross. Jesus' baptism is the acceptance and the beginning of his mission as God's suffering Servant. He allowed himself to be numbered among sinners. Jesus submitted himself entirely to his Father's will. Out of love he consented to this baptism of death for the remission of our sins. Do you know the joy of trust and submission to God?

The Father proclaimed his entire delight in his Son and spoke

audibly for all to hear. The Holy Spirit, too, was present as he anointed Jesus for his ministry which began that day as he rose from the waters of the Jordan river. Jesus will be the source of the Spirit for all who come to believe in him. At his baptism the heavens were opened and the waters were sanctified by the descent of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, signifying the beginning of a new creation.

How can we enter into the mystery of Jesus' humble self-abasement and baptism? Gregory of Nazianzus, a seventh century Church father tells us: "Let us be buried with Christ by Baptism to rise with him; let us go down with him to be raised with him; and let us rise with him to be glorified with him." Do you want to see changes in your life? And do you want to become a more effective instrument of the gospel? Examine Jesus' humility and ask the Holy Spirit to forge this same attitude in your heart. As you do, heaven will open for you as well. The Lord is ever ready to renew us in his Spirit and to anoint us for mission. We are called to be "light" and "salt" to those around us. The Lord wants his love and truth to shine through us that others may see the goodness and truth of God's message of salvation. Ask the Lord to fill you with his Holy Spirit that you may radiate the joy of the gospel to those around you.

"Lord Jesus, fill me with your Holy Spirit and inflame my heart with the joy of the gospel. May I find joy in seeking to please you just as you found joy in seeking to please your Father"