

The Baptism of the Lord

Isiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10; Acts 10:34-38; Mark 1:7-11

Approximately 71% of the earth's surface is covered by water. Up to 60% of the human adult body is water. According to the Journal of Biological Chemistry, the brain and heart are composed of 73% water, and the lungs are about 83% water. The skin contains 64% water, muscles and kidneys are 79%, and even the bones are watery: 31%.

It has been said that water is arguably the most important natural resource in the entire world. All life depends on it. Thus, it is not surprising that water plays a central role in the Bible, the greatest love story ever told.

Today we celebrate Jesus' baptism. Jesus being immersed in the waters of the Jordan River. It is my favorite celebration of the year. Through the baptism of Jesus we discover profound truths about God and ourselves.

Last week we celebrated Epiphany, where the three Magi from foreign nations worshipped Jesus, the new born King, and offered Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The Epiphany or revelation is that God's love in Christ is for all nations. Today, in the baptism of Jesus, we experience another epiphany where gifts are given. This time however, Jesus is not a child, he is an adult and the gifts are not from foreign kings, but from God's very actions and words.

To help us understand the gifts God gives to Jesus and to us in baptism, I want us to reflect on the scene. Jesus is coming up out of the water, the heavens are opened and the Spirit of God descends on Jesus as a dove.

Where in the Old Testament do we see water and the Spirit of God together? In Creation, Genesis 1:1. The Bible begins, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters."

In baptism, by the grace and power of God, we become a new creation. In the waters of baptism and by the power of the Spirit we are made new. Baptism cleanses us from original sin freeing us from Adam's curse.

The waters of baptism, in fact, point to many Old Testament images of God's creative, cleansing and redemptive work. We hear this poetically in the prayer over the water prayed before each baptism:

**Father, you give us grace through sacramental signs,
which tell us of the wonders of your unseen power.**

**In baptism we use your gift of water,
which you have made a rich symbol
of the grace you give us in this sacrament.**

**At the very dawn of creation
your Spirit breathed on the waters,
making them the wellspring of all holiness.**

**The waters of the great flood
you made a sign of the waters of baptism,
that make an end of sin
and a new beginning of goodness.**

**Through the waters of the Red Sea
you led Israel out of slavery,
to be an image of God's holy people,
set free from sin by baptism.**

**In the waters of the Jordan
your Son was baptized by John
and anointed with the Spirit.**

**Your Son willed that water and blood
should flow from his side
as he hung upon the cross.**

**After his resurrection he told his disciples:
"Go out and teach all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."**

**Father, look now with love upon your Church,
and unseal for her the fountain of baptism.**

**By the power of the Spirit
give to this water the grace of your Son,**

**so that in the sacrament of baptism
all those whom you have created in your likeness
may be cleansed from sin
and rise to a new birth
by water and the Holy Spirit.**

What a powerful and revealing prayer. Water is a vital sign of God's healing mercies. Through creation, the flood, the Exodus and through Jesus' pierced side on the cross, water has been an instrument of new life and redemption. In baptism, God sacramentally brings together these sacred waters that we who enter may become a new creation, filled with the Holy Spirit and new life.

St. Paul writes in Romans, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4).

In baptism we become a new creation, empowered and sealed by the Holy Spirit, the very life of God within us.

Yet, in baptism we are not only a new creation empowered by the Holy Spirit (as amazing as that is), we are also adopted by God and enter a new relationship with God! We are totally and unconditionally claimed and loved by God. Through the waters of baptism and by God's very voice we, as Jesus was, are claimed as God's beloved children. Jesus was a son by the mystery of God's will and Jesus' humility. We are sons and daughters of God through adoption. In baptism God signs our adoption papers. Although we do not hear the words "You are my beloved son" as Jesus did, God speaks them, nevertheless, to each of us, His beloved sons and daughters, from the depth of His heart.

We too often lose sight of this essential mystery: our truest and deepest identity comes from God. God claims us as His own. God chooses us. God chose you. You are God's beloved!

The Apostle John wrote, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (I John 3:1). As children of God we were adopted into God's family to live in a new relationship with God and one another.

The heavens opening up and God's voice descending with such loving affirmation makes clear we were created for God, to live in, with, and through God now and for all eternity in heaven. The heavens are open.

This is the true gift of baptism, we are adopted and claimed as God's beloved children. Why else would Jesus command his followers to, "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19)? God desires all His children to know of God's unconditional love. We are God's precious and beloved children.

With the personal challenges you are dealing with and with all the chaos, political divisions, COVID-19 concerns, and the major unrest our nation is experiencing, I pray reflecting on your baptism and God's deep and eternal love (where our true identity is found) will, like a faithful friend, help give you peace and lead you to the heart of God.

Moreover, in the truth of God's adoptive love, may we seek this new year to grow in our relationship with God. With God our Father, Christ our brother, redeemer and Lord, and the Holy Spirit our comforter, counselor and prayer warrior, may we live in the freedom, mystery, and blessing of the children of God.

In addition, may this new year inspire greater understanding, devotion, and love for the privilege of being God's beloved children.

God is for you! The water and gifts of baptism make this clear. May Jesus' baptism and your own inspire your faith and relationship with God, our Lord, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me.

God bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve

If you have not been baptized, let's talk!

One tool God gave us to understand His love and to grow in relationship to God is the Bible. I mentioned last week and want to mention again a wonderful resource for hearing and studying the Bible this new year, "Bible in One Year Podcast" by Fr. Michael Schmitz.

You can access the "Bible in One Year Podcast" with this link:

<https://media.ascensionpress.com/category/ascension-podcasts/bibleinayear/>

Each 20-25 minute episode of Ascension's Bible in a Year Podcast includes two to three scripture readings, prayer, and a reflection from Fr. Mike Schmitz to help us hear and understand God's Word.

It is never too late to begin. Even if you are only able to listen to a few episodes a week or a month, any time with God's Word pleases God.

Two other great resources that have encouraged my relationship with God and understanding of God's Word are: www.formed.org; and www.wordonfire.org