

## **My Beloved**

Baptism of the Lord 2010

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

Now, I realize that, in one week, we have made quite the jump:  
from the Epiphany to the Baptism of the Lord—a 33 year jump!  
What? *Why?*

It is true that there are few details regarding what happens in between,  
regarding Jesus' home life, before he embarks on his ministerial tour.  
But we could at least celebrate what we do have:  
the presentation of Jesus in the Temple or the finding of Jesus in the Temple.  
Why such silence regarding Jesus' childhood and young adulthood?  
Why would God have it this way?  
All we can really do is trust that all Jesus lived in His hidden life  
is important and is salvific for the world as well.  
His hidden life is, well, just hidden

From Epiphany to Baptism: we go from manifestation to manifestation.  
Aaah: a commonality.  
With the Baptism of the Lord we have another epiphany.  
Jesus is *made manifest, revealed* in this interesting incident....

But what do we celebrate when we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus?  
Well, what exactly occurs here?  
We have a crowd filled with expectation,  
who will have their expectation more than met, and thus know great joy.  
They are seekers, seekers who first think  
that John the Baptist might be the Messiah for whom they so long.  
In true fashion, John simply points beyond himself.  
And what he says helps us to understand this Baptism of Jesus.  
We *need* understanding, for it is odd that Jesus be baptized.  
Jesus has no need to be baptized.  
Indeed, this is a great theological question:  
if Jesus has no need to be baptized, then why was He?

- To make John the Baptist feel good about his efforts?
- Because He could not resist the cool waters on a hot day?

Jesus had *no* need for Baptism.  
He is “full of grace” (John 1:14)  
—which is what we believe Baptism confers...

Jesus can only be baptized if He is to make use of John's Baptism.

He fittingly receives John's Baptism because

1. it does *not* confer what He does not need, i.e. grace.
2. it is the Baptism that stands at the *threshold* of the *New Covenant*.

How does Jesus make use of John's Baptism?

Aside from the Trinitarian revelation that it affords  
(which is no minor affair!)

Jesus makes use of John's Baptism

to *institute* the Baptism which *does* confer grace, *the* Baptism.

As St. Ambrose said 1600+ years ago:

**"Our Lord was baptized because He wished, not to be cleansed,  
but to cleanse the waters, that,  
being purified by the flesh of Christ that knew no sin,  
they might have the virtue of baptism."**

In being baptized, Jesus makes a promise: to use the simple element of water  
to communicate His life in a special way.

How wonderful, how wonderfully merciful.

Note that this perspective has been that of most of the Christian tradition,  
i.e., this is a very *Catholic* (*mainline* Protestant) understanding of Baptism.

If you were to go to a mega-church, "Grace church" for example,  
they would probably tell you that Baptism does not communicate grace.

For them, Baptism is simply a sign to the community

that a person has accepted Jesus Christ as his/her personal Lord and Savior.

They baptize simply because Jesus said to, not because anything happens.

We believe that, in Baptism, God makes use of symbolically rich water  
effectively to communicate grace to us flesh and blood beings.

a gratuitous gift that does not depend on our understanding.

God gives freely—hence our Baptism of children—and we respond.

The Baptism of Jesus not only establishes the sacrament of Baptism.

The Baptism of Jesus reveals what occurs for those who are joined to Him,

His friends—in particular through Baptism.

Jesus comes to be Baptized in *the Jordan*

—through which the Israelites entered the Promised Land.

By grace, and thus through Baptism,

we believe that we are granted to enter the "Promised Land".

What is the "Promised Land"?

The "Promised Land" is not a place. It is nothing less than *God* Himself.

As suggested we have a Trinitarian revelation.

**“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.”**

**“Heaven was opened!”**

Heaven opened, the skies opened are the Divine opened.

**“The Holy Spirit descended upon him  
in bodily form like a dove.”**

**“Descended”** confirms the divine origin of Jesus.

But why a dove?

A dove is a gentle and loving and gregarious and uncomplicated creature.

‘Tis revelation of the Holy Spirit: gentle, loving, gregarious, uncomplicated.

The Holy Spirit is thus, and the Holy Spirit, received at Baptism,  
brings this about in those who allow Him.

Then comes a voice from heaven, expressing divine delight.

We have: Son, Holy Spirit, Father.

This epiphany is not only of Jesus but of the *Trinity*.

It is the first explicit revelation of the Trinity in the life of Jesus.

Today, we celebrate

- Jesus as God
- God as Trinity
- ourselves as beloved children of God

Jesus is the Beloved, in whom, *we* are the beloved.

Each of us is a beloved child of God.

God has given us everything, so that we be born again and live His very life  
—which means: a happiness deep in the heart that no one/nothing can take.

And, although we can lack love and “have” ADD and get easily bored,  
the Holy Spirit safeguards the child of God in us,

in whom God is well pleased, in whom God takes pleasure.

We, of course, must take ownership, make choices, *seek* God.

It is, after all, a *relationship*.

But God makes it possible, and safeguards the treasures He places within us.

Let us be full of hope.

Let us choose the Triune God, knowing that He is present and faithful.

If I may close with words from St. Gregory Nazianzus  
(also uttered 1600+ years ago):

**“You are to enjoy more and more  
the pure and dazzling light of the Trinity,  
as now you have received—though not in its fullness  
—a ray of its splendor,  
proceeding from the One God, in Christ Jesus our Lord,  
to whom be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.”**