



LIVING THE GOSPEL

**The Baptism of The Lord
January 12th 2025**

Theme: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased"

Gathering Prayer

All: Almighty ever-living God, who, when Christ had been baptized in the River Jordan and as the Holy Spirit descended upon him, solemnly declared him your beloved Son, grant that your children by adoption, reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, may always be well pleasing to you. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

¹⁵ As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Christ, ¹⁶ John answered them all, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire...."

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased."

Gospel Focus

When Jesus baptized, he does not need its cleansing aspect. He is free from sin and does not need the repentance that John's baptism signified. At Jesus' baptism, he adds a dimension to the practice, elevating it from human devotional practice to sacrament of God's grace. Baptism still signifies repentance and is still cleansing; it removes the stain of original sin and restores us to right relationship with God. It is *also*, now, the means by which God adopts us as children and coheirs with Christ. Although it may not be as clear as in this gospel story, at all our baptisms, the heavens opens, the Spirit descends, and God declares us beloved children in whom God is well please.

Gospel Reflection

In the second reading today we see Peter as a kind of older sibling, wrestling to let go of his notion that, as one who belongs to God's firstborn, he could claim primacy of affection from his heavenly parent. The scene in Acts 10 is the culmination of a very difficult struggle on Peter's part to accept that God's favor could also include others who were not part of God's firstborn. It took a thrice-repeated vision before Peter could recognize Cornelius as one of God's favored. Peter's initial opposition to the heavenly

voice that instructed him to eat something he considered unclean was emphatic (vv.13-14): "Certainly not" (NABRE), "By no means" (NRSV).

After entering Cornelius' house, Peter conversed with the centurion (v.27). Undoubtedly, in the course of their exchange, Peter discovers that he is not the only one to whom God has spoken through visions. Cornelius too has encountered an angel of God who has called him by name (v.3). Moreover, Peter had to admit to all in the house, that whoever fears God and acts uprightly is "acceptable" to God. He acknowledges that "God shows no impartiality."

While this is a great breakthrough for Peter, his recognition of Cornelius as "acceptable" is not a ringing endorsement. Might there be a hint in Peter's statement that he still considers himself among "God's favorites" and that he thinks of Cornelius more like a stepbrother who certainly could not displace him in the divine affections? More time would be needed before Peter could see the Gentile as being loved as passionately by God as he is.

In the gospel, another heavenly revelation highlights Jesus' specialness as God's beloved. While the divine voice at Jesus baptism is directed to him ("You are my beloved Son"; cf. Matt 3:17, "This is my beloved Son"), Luke has added "all the people" to the scene. In this way, Luke hints that they, too, experience the delight of God in them, as they are washed clean, newly born, and favored. As we recall our own baptism, we know that we, too, have been in that thin space where "heaven was opened" and the barrier between humanity and divinity is dissolved. With Jesus taking on human flesh and then inviting us to partake of his flesh and blood, the special place he holds in God's affection is extended to all.

That God is partial to each of us is startling. This divine favor causes wonder and also carries with it a mission. In the first reading, Isaiah elaborates the mission entrusted to a chosen servant: to bring forth justice. In biblical parlance, justices does not mean he or she gets what he or she deserves. Rather, it signifies that those who know themselves to be favored by God undeservedly have been empowered by the Spirit to be light, to speak truth, and to be compassionate to those who feel like "a bruised reed," fanning into flame the spark of God's love wherever a smoldering wick is found.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD ; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." ⁹ You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" ¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. ¹¹ He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

Responsorial Reading — Ps 29:1-2, 3-4, 9-10

R: The Lord will bless his people with peace.

Give to the Lord, you sons of God, give to the Lord glory and praise, give to the Lord the glory due his name; adore the Lord in holy attire. **(R)**

The voice of the Lord is over the waters, the Lord, over vast waters. The voice of the Lord is mighty; the voice of the Lord is majestic. **(R)**

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. **(R)**

Second Reading — Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

¹¹For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹²It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

^{3:4}But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Catechism of The Catholic Church

536. The baptism of Jesus is on his part the acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God's suffering Servant. He allows himself to be numbered among sinners; he is already "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world".(Jn 1:29; cf. Is 53:12) Already he is anticipating the "baptism" of his bloody death.(Cf. Mk 10:38; Lk 12:50) Already he is coming to "fulfil all righteousness", that is, he is submitting himself entirely to his Father's will: out of love he consents to this baptism of death for the remission of our sins.(Mt 3:15; cf. 26:39) The Father's voice responds to the Son's acceptance, proclaiming his entire delight in his Son.(Cf. Lk 3:22; Is 42:1) The Spirit whom Jesus possessed in fullness from his conception comes to "rest on him".(Jn 1:32-33; cf. Is 11:2) Jesus will be the source of the Spirit for all mankind. At his baptism "the heavens were opened"(Mt 3:16) - the heavens that Adam's sin had closed - and the waters were sanctified by the descent of Jesus and the Spirit, a prelude to the new creation.

608. After agreeing to baptize him along with the sinners, John the Baptist looked at Jesus and pointed him out as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world".(Jn 1:29; cf. Lk 3:21; Mt 3:14-15; Jn 1:36) By doing so, he reveals that Jesus is at the same time the suffering Servant who silently allows himself to be led to the slaughter and who bears the sin of the multitudes, and also the Paschal Lamb, the symbol of Israel's redemption at the first Passover.(Is 53:7,12; cf. Jer 11:19; Ex 12:3-14; Jn 19:36; 1 Cor 5:7) Christ's whole life expresses his mission: "to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."(Mk 10:45)

696. Fire. While water signifies birth and the fruitfulness of life given in the Holy Spirit, fire symbolizes the transforming energy of the Holy Spirit's actions. The prayer of the prophet Elijah, who "arose like fire" and whose "word burned like a torch," brought down fire from heaven on the sacrifice on Mount Carmel. (Sir 48:1; cf. 1 Kings 18:38-

39.) This event was a "figure" of the fire of the Holy Spirit, who transforms what he touches. John the Baptist, who goes "before [the Lord] in the spirit and power of Elijah," proclaims Christ as the one who "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." (Lk 1:17; 3:16) Jesus will say of the Spirit: "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!" (Lk 12:49.) In the form of tongues "as of fire," the Holy Spirit rests on the disciples on the morning of Pentecost and fills them with himself (Acts 2:3-4.) The spiritual tradition has retained this symbolism of fire as one of the most expressive images of the Holy Spirit's actions. "Do not quench the Spirit." (1 Thess 5:1.)

2600. The Gospel according to St. Luke emphasizes the action of the Holy Spirit and the meaning of prayer in Christ's ministry. Jesus prays *before* the decisive moments of his mission: before his Father's witness to him during his baptism and Transfiguration, and before his own fulfillment of the Father's plan of love by his Passion.(Cf. Lk 3:21; 9:28; 22:41-44) He also prays before the decisive moments involving the mission of his apostles: at his election and call of the Twelve, before Peter's confession of him as "the Christ of God," and again that the faith of the chief of the Apostles may not fail when tempted.(Cf. Lk 6:12; 9:18-20; 22:32) Jesus' prayer before the events of salvation that the Father has asked him to fulfill is a humble and trusting commitment of his human will to the loving will of the Father.

Sharing and Discussion

1. Jesus was baptized despite the fact that he was born without sin, what lesson does it hold for us?
2. CCC 536 says, "The baptism of Jesus is on his part the acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God's suffering Servant" What does your baptismal identity mean to you? How do you live out the vows that you made (or your parents made on your behalf) at your baptism?
3. John, in his humility, promises that someone greater than him was coming. He points to Christ. Do you acknowledge that it is God alone who brings our good work to completion?

Closing Prayer

All: O God, you gave us your beloved Son and the fire of your Spirit. May we grow in grace and strength as we seek to live our lives as your adopted sons and daughters. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.