

The Sunday Missive – January 9, 2022 The Baptism of Our Lord

Hymn 448 O love, how deep, how broad, how high

O love, how deep, how broad, how high, how passing thought and fantasy,
That God, the Son of God, should take our mortal form for mortals' sake!

For us baptized, for us he bore his holy fast and hungered sore;
For us temptations sharp he knew; for us the tempter overthrew.

For us he prayed; for us he taught; for us his daily works he wrought:
By words and signs and actions, thus still seeking not himself, but us.

All glory to our Lord and God for love so deep, so high, so broad;
The Trinity whom we adore forever and forevermore.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUywJVC1kB4> OR

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inkQM1-PQtM>

Collect of the Day

Gracious Creator, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him
your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are
baptized into his name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly
confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns,
one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

Isaiah 43:1-7

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O
Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are
mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the
rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be
burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the
Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in
exchange for you. Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love
you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life. Do not fear,
for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I
will gather you; I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not
withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the
earth— everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I
formed and made."

Psalm 29

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings* ***Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.***

Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name* ***Worship the Lord in holy splendor.***

The voice of the Lord is over the waters* ***The God of glory thunders over mighty waters.***

The voice of the Lord is powerful* ***The voice of the Lord is full of majesty.***

The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars* ***The Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.***

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf* ***And Sirion like a young wild ox.***

The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire and shakes the wilderness* ***The Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.***

The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare* ***And in his temple all say, "Glory!"***

The Lord sits enthroned over the flood* ***Enthroned as king forever.***

May the Lord give strength to the people* ***May the Lord bless the people with peace!***

Acts 8:14-17

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Hymn 135 Songs of thankfulness and praise

Songs of thankfulness and praise, Jesus, Lord, to thee we raise,
Manifested by the star to the sages from afar;
Branch of royal David's stem in thy birth at Bethlehem;
Anthems be to thee addressed, God in man made manifest.

Manifest at Jordan's stream, Prophet, Priest, and King supreme;
And at Cana, wedding-guest, in thy Godhead manifest;
Manifest in power divine, changing water into wine;
Anthems be to thee addressed, God in man made manifest.

Manifest in making whole palsied limbs and fainting soul;
Manifest in valiant fight, quelling all the devil's might;
Manifest in gracious will, ever bringing good from ill;
Anthems be to thee addressed, God in man made manifest.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pMGExI99tk>

Luke 3:15-22

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. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

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."

Beyond Discipleship -- Epiphany1C

Epiphany is a day set aside to remember the awakening of all people to God's sojourn amongst humanity. When the traditional Day of the Epiphany among Western Christianity, January 6 occurs on a Sunday, we celebrate it then – pandemics permitting. In years like this one, when Epiphany is on a weekday, we have the choice of moving it to an adjacent Sunday – that we would have done last week, had we gathered. Today, in cosmic protest against the seemingly interminable scourge, we are stretching time and season just a bit to enjoy our Christmas atmosphere for an extra week.

Why do we celebrate these things? At the Feast of the Incarnation – Christmas – we joyfully reiterate our belief that there is a benevolent higher power in the universe, and that power briefly resided among us as a fellow human being in the

form of Jesus of Nazareth. Epiphany is when we take ownership of that power for use in our own lives by reminding ourselves and anyone who will listen us that the gospel, the grace and the glory of God are available to all humankind. "Go then," says Jesus, "and make disciples of all nations." But as our story today conveys, there is more to a Christian life than baptism alone. When the Holy Spirit inhabits us, we become apostles as well as believers. Jesus stay among us would have no discernable value if its disciples never made this move from the hearts and minds into the hands and mouths of its people.

In the East, they don't bother so much with Epiphany, preferring to concentrate on Jesus' baptism in the Jordan that prompted a voice from heaven, according to tradition. The voice called out, "You are my son, my beloved. With you I am well pleased." That voice was the Epiphany for whomever heard it.

Our framework for hearing these stories in church is as follows: Each year, our readings for the Sunday after the Epiphany are the same, except for the Gospel reading, which rotates in a three-year cycle amongst Mathew, Mark and Luke. These have been called the Synoptic Gospels because they give linear and in many ways similar synopses of the life of Jesus. The Gospel of John, by contrast, contains many elements absent in the other three, and is not arranged as a chronicle of Jesus' life. Many Christian denominations have decided to follow the same, or very similar arrangements of scripture readings, currently known as the Revised Common Lectionary. So on a given Sunday, Christians around the world -- especially in the West -- are likely to be considering the same passages. Of course, we can also read them on our own -- whenever we like!

The cycle begins on the first Sunday of Advent, so last November 28 we began Year C. Next November 27, we'll start Year A again. Most of the gospel readings in any given year are taken from the same gospel version, to facilitate our reception of each book as its own entity. In Year C, we read mostly from Luke.

In common with other peoples, the Hebrews used water for religious purification. One of the ceremonies by which new converts were admitted to Judaism was baptism. But there are striking differences between those ceremonies and what John was doing in the Jordan. John baptized everybody, not just Jewish prospects. "The Kingdom of God is at hand," he declared, in critical defiance of the leaders of the synagogue. He taught that baptism was the way to prepare for the reign of God, not for participation in worldly activities. John's baptism of repentance was meant to create space for the spirit of God to enter people. When Jesus underwent John's baptism, this spirit was evident as a dove appeared -- in bodily form, no less -- and a voice was heard, "You are my beloved."

As we heard in our story from Acts about the Samaritans whom Philip baptizes, baptism creates the opportunity, but for the baptism to have more than a sacramental meaning the baptized person must grow to accept the Spirit and put it to use however she can. 'Yes, we have been baptized, but are we living as if

it were so?' is the question. Are we welcoming, listening to- and acting upon the Spirit that has come into us, a Spirit that can defy and defeat any worldly power? Or did we just get wet?

Baptism is neither wholly a doctrine to be taught, nor merely an ancient ritual, unconnected to our daily lives. Baptism is the sacramental force whereby rebirth by water can open us to the Spirit who propels us into becoming what we had not been before: changed and prayerful people, the Body of Christ at work in the world. It opens us to spiritual maturity, and connects us with the rest of humankind – which are the same thing, after all. And, as John Donne observed, “When the Church baptizes a child, that action concerns me. For that child is thereby connected to that which is my head too, and ingrafted into that body whereof I am a member.”

Each of the synoptic gospels contains an account of Jesus' baptism by John, and the differences among these three accounts are subtle, but important. Luke's emphasis is on prayer. Frequently in his gospel, Luke shows us Jesus praying. This entire story of the baptism of Jesus is set in a context of prayer: As Christians, if we are to be like Jesus, however haltingly, we are likewise to be in prayer. Thus, throughout Luke's other text, known as The Acts of the Apostles, we see the followers of Jesus in prayer. What begins with baptism is nourished and enlivened when we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts. As Jesus welcomed the Spirit in prayer, so must we. Are we disciples by virtue of our baptism into the Christian Church? Technically, yes. But are we also apostles? Do we also pray for the Holy Spirit to enter us, to show us the way and give us the strength to become those who go out and do God's work in the world, whatever that may mean?

Henri Nouwen writes that “Praying means being constantly ready to let go of our certainties, to move on further from where we are now – spiritually speaking. Prayer will demand that we take to the road again and again, leaving our houses and looking to new lands for ourselves and our fellow human beings. That is why prayer demands spiritual poverty, that is, the readiness to live a life in which we have nothing to lose, so that we are always beginning afresh. Whenever we choose this poverty, we make ourselves vulnerable, it's true, but we also become free to see the world in its true form. We have no need to defend ourselves, and we can tell out loudly what we know, through our intimate contact with the One who is the source of all life. It demands courage to make real the consequences of a prayerful life. Therefore, it is vital to remember that courage is also a gift from God for which we can pray.”

Thomas Merton asks, “Are we really supposed to be the light of the world. Are we really supposed to be saints? How can we possibly desire holiness without making complete fools of ourselves in front of others? How many of us really believe sanctity is possible for us? But if we are called by God to holiness of life, and if holiness is beyond our personal power to achieve (which it certainly is), it

follows that God must give us the light, the strength and the courage to fulfill the task.”

Scholarly articles have depicted some of the prisoners being held in the American prison in Guantanamo, Cuba. One man in particular stands out, who recently published a memoir of his time there. Arrested in his home country of Mauritania soon after 9/11/2001, this man ended up in Guantanamo, where he was held until 2016, undergoing horrific torture. The initial suspicions about him proved insubstantial, and the U.S. government prosecutor declined to bring charges or to charge him with any crime. He was cleared for release back in 2010, but so-called ‘appeals’ of that decision kept him imprisoned.

Here’s the rub. One of the ways his captors tried to break his spirit was to forcefully separate him from that spirit physically. He was forbidden to pray. Any time he was observed in an attitude, or posture or making a gesture of prayer, he would be beaten, blasted with noise or light, and forced to do something else. But they – we -- never succeeded in separating this man from God’s grace. He is a Muslim, not a disciple of the Church, and thus would never describe himself as an Apostle, a conveyor of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But one thing is plain, the Holy Spirit entered and never left him. His prayers may have been forbidden, but they were never silenced. Despite the horrors of unjust captivity, he knows that when he passes through the waters, Allah is with him and the rivers have not overwhelmed him. He has walked through fire, but the flame has not consumed him. In a conversation three years before his release, this man said he held no grudge against any of the people who had held and hurt him, and that he dreamt one day to sit with all of them around a cup of tea, after having learned so much from one another.

Heavenly Creator, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight. Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in your paths we may not stumble, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Prayers of the People

Let us pray to God, who is made manifest in Jesus Christ, responding to “Lord, in your mercy” with “Hear our prayer.” As the prophet Isaiah rang out, “Arise, shine; for your light has come”; empower your Church, O God, to ring out the Good News of the Light of your son Jesus, which pierces even the deepest darkness. Lord, in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

As a star rose high into the nighttime sky to draw the nations to the Christ-child; send your blessing, O God, on this nation, and every nation, and draw the whole world to your peace and truth. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

As John the Baptist guided throngs of people to the edge of the wilderness and baptized Jesus in the River Jordan, we pray that you would guide our country and our leaders to the ways of justice and righteousness. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

As Jesus climbed the mountaintop, and proclaimed blessings on the people of the world; we pray for the sick and the distressed, the poor and the lame, all those in any need or trouble, especially Karen, Kyle, Carrie, Bill, are there others?
_____ Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

As Jesus called his disciples to leave their nets and boats, and follow him; we pray for those we love who have followed Jesus to your Heavenly Kingdom. We pray for those who have died, especially those we name now, silently or aloud: -
_____ Give them your peace. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus, Light of the World, hear our prayers, and make us reflections of your Light, that the places of darkness in our world would be pierced by your Light, and that all nations would be drawn to you and be overwhelmed with joy. **Amen.**

Hymn 637 How firm a foundation

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent word!
What more can he say than to you he hath said,
To you that for refuge to Jesus have fled?

"Fear not, I am with thee; O be not dismayed!
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

"When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell shall endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake."

Under One Small Star

My apologies to chance for calling it necessity.
My apologies to necessity if I'm mistaken, after all.
Please, don't be angry, happiness, that I take you as my due.
May my dead be patient with the way my memories fade.
My apologies to time for all the world I overlook each second.
My apologies to past loves for thinking that the latest is the first.
Forgive me, distant wars, for bringing flowers home.
Forgive me, open wounds, for pricking my finger.
I apologize for my record of minuets to those who cry from the depths.
I apologize to those who wait in railway stations for being asleep today at five a.m.
Pardon me, hounded hope, for laughing from time to time.
Pardon me, deserts, that I don't rush to you bearing a spoonful of water.
And you, falcon, unchanging year after year, always in the same cage,
your gaze always fixed on the same point in space,
forgive me, even if it turns out you were stuffed.
My apologies to the felled tree for the table's four legs.
My apologies to great questions for small answers.
Truth, please don't pay me much attention.
Dignity, please be magnanimous.
Bear with me, O mystery of existence, as I pluck the occasional thread from your train.
Soul, don't take offense that I've only got you now and then.
My apologies to everything that I can't be everywhere at once.
My apologies to everyone that I can't be each woman and each man.
I know I won't be justified as long as I live, since I myself stand in my own way.
Don't bear me ill will, speech, that I borrow weighty words,
then labor heavily so that they may seem light.

Wysława Szymborska