

BIBLE STUDY
January 6, 2020

The Baptism of the Lord

Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6-7

Matthew 3: 13-17

Acts 10: 34-38

1. Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6-7

- One of the four “Servant Songs” of the Second Isaiah (40-55). The others are 49: 1-7 (Hear me, coastlands, listen, distant peoples); 50: 4-11 (The Lord has given me a well-trained tongue); 52:13-53: 12 (See, my servant, shall prosper; he shall be raised high and greatly exalted).
- Christians came to see the “Servant” as Jesus. Servant was one of the first titles given to Jesus when the apostles began to preach after the Resurrection and Pentecost. See Acts 3: 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant, Jesus, whom you handed over and denied in Pilate’s presence...
- The relationship between God and the Servant: the Servant has been chosen by God; God upholds him; God is pleased with him; God has put his spirit upon him.
- The mission of the Servant: He will bring forth justice to the nations; he will do it in a quiet manner; he will be gentle and compassionate; he will be faithful to his mission of justice. He will be successful in his mission.
- God himself has personally called him and commissioned him for the work of justice. God has formed him. He will have a very public and visible mission as a “covenant” and as “light.” He will personally the mission.
- He will give sight to the blind, set prisoners free; bring those in darkness into the light.
- The details of Jesus’ public ministry reflect the identity and mission of the Servant.

2. Matthew 3: 13-17

- The early church wondered why Jesus was baptized. If John’s baptism was for repentance, why would Jesus, who was the sinless Son of God, need to be baptized? John expresses this confusion of the community by suggesting that Jesus baptize him. Jesus says that John should baptize him in order to fulfill all righteousness.
- Righteousness means fulfilling the obligations one has because of a relationship. For Israel, righteousness meant being faithful to the covenant that God established with Moses by fulfilling the law given at Sinai. The reason for fulfilling the law was to do what God wanted. Jesus will dispute with the Pharisees and scribes about what righteousness means. For Jesus, it will mean mercy and compassion for people. For the Pharisees, I will mean obedience to the letter of the law.

- At Jesus' baptism, righteousness—doing what God wants—is for Jesus to be baptized to show that he is in solidarity with repentant Israel. His submission to baptism out of solidarity anticipates his obedience to the will of the Father that he will die upon the Cross for the forgiveness of sins of all.
 - Jesus' infancy stories have shown his solidarity with the people. Jesus has recapitulated the history of his people. Joseph's dreams about taking Mary as his wife and feeling into Egypt remind us of the dreams of Joseph in Egypt. His escape from Herod into Egypt has him follow in the footsteps of his people who went down into Egypt and were called out of Egypt by God. His escape of the slaughter of the Innocents by Herod reminds us of Moses' escape from Pharaoh's edict that all Hebrew baby boys be killed at birth. Now, Jesus intensified his identification and solidarity with the people by joining them for baptism. He unites himself with the desire of the people for conversion and redemption.
 - If Jesus was one with the people in being baptized, what happened after his baptism was unique to him. The heavens were opened=this refers to Isaiah 64: 1 "Oh that you would tear open the heavens and come down." The cry of Israel for a return of prophecy and communication between heaven and earth is answered. The spirit descends in the form of a dove. This reminds us of Creation when the spirit hovered over the chaos as the act of creation began. It signifies that what Jesus brings is a new creation.
 - God the Father speaks and identifies Jesus as his Son. We have been prepared for this from the birth stories in which the child Jesus is identified as Son of David and Son of God. God's proclamation refers back to Psalm 2:7 "You are my son today I have begotten you." However, he is Son in a unique way. Not just in the sense that every person is a son and daughter of God but that he is uniquely God's Son.
 - Not only God's Son but God's Beloved. This reminds us of Gen 22: 2 in which Isaac is described as Abraham's only and beloved son—who will submit himself to be sacrificed just as Jesus obediently submits himself to sacrifice on the Cross.
 - It also reminds us of the first reading, Isaiah 42: 1-4 in which the servant is described as the one with whom God is pleased. It also refers to the Spirit that God has put upon him. In Jesus' baptism he is empowered by the Spirit for his mission.
 - God is well pleased with his beloved Son when he unites himself in solidarity with sinful Israel. God desires the solidarity and closeness of Jesus with his people.
- 3. Acts 10: 34-38**
- Peter's speech to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile who has asked to be baptized, is typical of the early preaching of the Church by the apostles.
 - Even though God chose Israel as his special people that does not mean that he has rejected other nations. God shows no partiality and accept anyone who fears him and acts uprightly.

- However, Israel played an important role in God revelation to humanity. This revelation that was begun in the Law and Prophets came to a climax in Jesus Christ who is lord of all. The message of God through Israel and up to Jesus is peace—reconciliation.
- The ministry of Jesus was an historical event. God entered into history through Jesus. Jesus' ministry—his preaching, miracles, and acts—are important because they are the means by which God was with his people in a new and unique way. Identifying Jesus as being "of Nazareth" is a way of underscoring this Jesus of and in history. God acted in Jesus. Therefore, it was important to record the ministry of Jesus first in the oral tradition and then in the written tradition of the Gospels.
- This passage references the baptism of John which Jesus experienced. At his baptism Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power. This is an interpretation of what we saw in the Gospel reading.
- Jesus' mission—which is the mission of the Servant in Isaiah—is described as going about doing good and healing those oppressed by the devil. Jesus is rescuing people out the grasp of the devil and delivering them into the Kingdom of God. He did this because God was with him.