

The Baptism of the Lord© - January 13, 2019

(Isaiah 40:1-5,9-11; Ps. 104; Titus 2:11-14;3:4-7; Luke 3:15-16,21-22:)

In the 2nd to the last year in the seminary, for the Fall Term of 1998, my class studied in Israel and lived within the Old City walls of Jerusalem. In one of my classes, which was called Biblical Archaeology, a Catholic Professor taught us the second half of that class. One site which we visited was called the Qumran settlement near the Dead Sea. A group of what we would call monks had moved out there, away from Jerusalem because they felt Jerusalem and even the temple had become corrupted. They moved out there to prepare for the coming Messiah. This professor helped to decipher the scrolls the Jewish Monks had hidden in clay jars in caves on the hillside in order to preserve them. The the scrolls had described their way of life there and had a nearly complete copy of the Book of Isaiah, from which our first reading is taken. They had evidence in some of their writings that John the Baptist may have lived with them before he began his public pronouncement and baptizing in preparation of the Messiah.

Our gospel reading begins, “The people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ.” John answered them all, saying, “I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” That same expectation of the Messiah may have inspired the Magi from the East to research the Jewish Scriptures and recognize the star and then to follow that star to Bethlehem. We hope that before the Savior returns he will inspire us and many more people to prepare for him with such determination.

“After all of the people had been baptized and 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.”

John’s baptism was much different than the baptism that Jesus has given us through His Church. John’s preaching was an encouragement to turn away from

sins toward God and his commandments. His baptism was a promise to do that. It was a sign of being purified – a turning away from sin.

The baptism of Jesus, is actually a cleansing of sin and a sharing in his life and so the life of the Holy Spirit and God the Father. That life and relationship between the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit. It is not only a turning away from sin, but being purified of sin and the life of the Spirit – being brought into that life and relationship. Being a Christian is not simply being a good person. Being a good person should flow from being a Christian and a member of the mystical body of Jesus. Baptism is a pure gift of grace – God’s life given us. It changes our soul, our spirit and conforms it to God’s divine Spirit. Being so changed, it provides the foundation for all of the other sacraments – God’s continued gift of grace - his life within us.

From our conception in our mother’s womb we inherit original sin. The word “sin” in the Spanish language means “without.” We are without that original relationship with God shared by Adam and Eve before the Fall and original sin. You might compare us to a child born from a mother who used drugs and the child itself is born with an addiction. Even though the child is not to blame, it suffers the same consequence. Or compare it to a child born in a dysfunctional family. Even in its mother’s womb it hears conversation and is affected by the life of the family. It is a wonderful gift given to us who are guilty and it justifies us and gives a relationship greater than that lost by Adam.

We can do some things that would lose God’s gift of life. That is why God has given us the gift of the sacrament of Penance to restore the fullness of Baptism. St. Paul reminds us in his letter to Titus, “Beloved: The grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age, as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ....)

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is the final event of the Christmas season. That and the changing of water to wine at the wedding of Cana are the

manifestation of Jesus as he begins his public ministry revealing Jesus of Nazareth from a different perspective. Jesus is the one in whom God keeps the promises made through Isaiah. He shows the world the glory, justice, power and abundant love of God.

Through baptism into Christ we share in his life in God and in his promised mission in the world to give comfort and salvation. We are the beneficiaries of his love and grace. We become the missionaries of his love to all his creatures. So the words of the Father to the Son are intended for us: “You are my beloved Son/daughter; with you I am well pleased.”