

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Baptism of the Lord—Year C

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

The Baptism of the Lord

With Year C Optional Readings

Reading I

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Thus says the LORD:

Here is my servant whom I uphold,
my chosen one with whom I am pleased,
upon whom I have put my spirit;
he shall bring forth justice to the nations,
not crying out, not shouting,
not making his voice heard in the street.
A bruised reed he shall not break,
and a smoldering wick he shall not quench,
until he establishes justice on the earth;
the coastlands will wait for his teaching.

I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice,
I have grasped you by the hand;
I formed you, and set you
as a covenant of the people,
a light for the nations,
to open the eyes of the blind,
to bring out prisoners from confinement,
and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.

OR:

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Comfort, give comfort to my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her
that her service is at an end,
her guilt is expiated;
indeed, she has received from the hand of the LORD
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:
In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!
Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!
Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill shall be made low;
the rugged land shall be made a plain,
the rough country, a broad valley.

Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together;
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Go up on to a high mountain,
Zion, herald of glad tidings;
cry out at the top of your voice,
Jerusalem, herald of good news!
Fear not to cry out
and say to the cities of Judah:
Here is your God!
Here comes with power
the Lord GOD,
who rules by a strong arm;
here is his reward with him,
his recompense before him.
Like a shepherd he feeds his flock;
in his arms he gathers the lambs,
carrying them in his bosom,
and leading the ewes with care.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10

R. (11b) 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 Lord will bless his people with peace.

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 Lord will bless his people with peace.

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. The Lord will bless his people with peace.

OR:

Psalm 104:1b-2, 3-4, 24-25, 27-28, 29-30

R. (1) **O bless the Lord, my soul.**

O LORD, my God, you are great indeed!

you are clothed with majesty and glory,
robed in light as with a cloak.

You have spread out the heavens like a tent-cloth;

R. **O bless the Lord, my soul.**

You have constructed your palace upon the waters.

You make the clouds your chariot;
you travel on the wings of the wind.

You make the winds your messengers,
and flaming fire your ministers.

R. **O bless the Lord, my soul.**

How manifold are your works, O LORD!

In wisdom you have wrought them all--
the earth is full of your creatures;

the sea also, great and wide,
in which are schools without number
of living things both small and great.

R. **O bless the Lord, my soul.**

They look to you to give them food in due time.

When you give it to them, they gather it;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

R. **O bless the Lord, my soul.**

If you take away their breath, they perish and return to the dust.

When you send forth your spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth.

R. **O bless the Lord, my soul.**

Reading II

Acts 10:34-38

Peter proceeded to speak to those gathered
in the house of Cornelius, saying:

“In truth, I see that God shows no partiality.

Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly
is acceptable to him.

You know the word that he sent to the Israelites
as he proclaimed peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all,
what has happened all over Judea,
beginning in Galilee after the baptism
that John preached,

how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth
with the Holy Spirit and power.
He went about doing good
and healing all those oppressed by the devil,
for God was with him.”

OR:

Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

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,
who gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness
and to cleanse for himself a people as his own,
eager to do what is good.

When the kindness and generous love
of God our savior appeared,
not because of any righteous deeds we had done
but because of his mercy,
He saved us through the bath of rebirth
and renewal by the Holy Spirit,
whom he richly poured out on us
through Jesus Christ our savior,
so that we might be justified by his grace
and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

Alleluia

Cf. Mark 9:7

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The heavens were opened and the voice of the Father thundered:
This is my beloved Son, listen to him.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

OR:

Cf. Luke 3:16

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

John said: One mightier than I is coming;
he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

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.”

After all 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.”

Exegesis

Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11

Chapter 40 of the *Book of the Prophet Isaiah* referred to by scripture scholars as *Second Isaiah* or *Deutero-Isaiah*. The scenery has shifted from the first 39 chapters as the Israelite People are now in exile. The diaspora, the exile in Babylon has begun. Jerusalem is destroyed and the great temple is a pile of rubble. The leaders of the people are in captivity in Babylon and many of the people are left to scatter, many quite literally in the desert.

The homilist should be aware of this context. This is the beginning of the second great salvation paradigm. Seeking answers for their plight they look to their own sinfulness and how they had strayed from God. Now they are turning towards God and yearning for His saving hand.

Written at the beginning of the Exile, *Deutero-Isaiah* seeks to bring the message of hope to the people. It is titled, *The Book of Consolation*, with our section sub-titled, *The Lord's Glory in Israel's Liberation*. When the author refers to Jerusalem, or Judah, he is referring not to a place but to a people. They are a people in need of a Savior.

The motif of God as Shepherd comes into vogue during this time-period. In a similar manner and in this historical setting, i.e., the Exile, both the Prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel also introduce this image. (Jer. 31:10, Ezek. 34). Through the Prophets God promises to shepherd His people, to gather and seek out the lost. The purpose of the shepherd is the life of the sheep.

A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the LORD! The image of the Way is introduced in *Deutero-Isaiah* as well. John the Baptist announces Jesus as "the Way of the Lord." Jesus later would proclaim Himself to be (I AM) both the Good Shepherd and the Way, the Truth and the Life. Jesus is the Way. He also reveals Himself as the Good Shepherd, e.g., "I Am the Good Shepherd." He is the mediator of God's love and God's life.

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

The stage was set in Isaiah 40, the people are recently exiled and are looking for a Savior to set them free from bondage. This expected Savior is referred to as, *the Servant of the Lord*. Looking back, we see the fulfillment of this prophecy in Jesus.

For some reason the Lectionary skips verse 5 which is as follows: "Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spreads out the earth with crops, Who gives breath to its people and spirit to those who walk on it."

The Creator God now seeks to save His people through His servant, upon whom He will also put His Spirit, e.g. the Holy Spirit that fell upon Jesus at His baptism, the Spirit that led and guided His life, the Spirit that He surrendered back to the Father from the Cross, the Spirit that raised Him from the dead, and the Spirit that He breathed upon the apostles in the Upper Room.

I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations. Jesus becomes the New Covenant of God's love. He becomes the Light of the World. The descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, symbolizes God's love pouring into the world in and through Jesus, His beloved Son and Servant. The Servant image will make way for the Suffering Servant Songs of the Prophet Isaiah.

Exegesis (Continued)

Acts 10:34-38

The caption at the beginning of Acts Chapter 10 reads, *The Inauguration of the Gentile Mission*. Our pericope is titled *Peter's Speech*. Chapter 10 begins with the vision of Cornelius and then is followed by the vision of Peter. The result of these two separate visions is that Peter comes to the house of Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile.

In Chapter 9 of Acts, Saul traveled to Jerusalem and met with the apostles, presumably Peter was there. So, Peter was introduced to Paul's calling by the Lord, to be a missionary to the Gentiles.

Now Peter, in a very personal way, is being called by the Lord to welcome the Gentile world into the Church. He boldly proclaims the Christ is "Lord of all." (vs 36). "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to Him." (vss. 34-35).

Cornelius and his household were baptized. "While Peter was still speaking these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the word." (Acts 10:44). "Then Peter responded, 'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit even as we have?' He ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." (Acts 10:46-48). Peter baptized the first of many Gentiles.

Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

Titus, a companion and coworker of St. Paul, was charged with the care of the Christian Community on the large Mediterranean Island of Crete. "For this reason, I left you in Crete so that you might set right what remains to be done and appoint presbyters in every town, as I directed you." (Ts 1:5).

Our pericope is titled *Transformation and Life*. It begins *For the grace of God has appeared saving all...* As in other readings chosen for this Liturgy of the *Baptism of the Lord*, there is a universal message of salvation for all people, Jew and Gentile alike. Water is an ancient symbol of human life; the water shows no partiality between Jew or Gentile. Jesus entered into the water of the Jordan River and offers the waters of rebirth to all people. *The kindness and generous love of God our Savior appeared.* (v 3-4). This kindness and generous love has appeared to all and is for all. *He saved us (all) through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He richly poured out on us (all) through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we (all) might be justified by His grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.* (vs 3:5-7).

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

Our Gospel passage from St. Luke today is a continuation of the account of the preaching of John the Baptist that began at Chapter 3, v 1.

And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" Luke will echo this same question as people responded to the preaching of St. Peter at Pentecost. "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, 'What are we to do my brothers?' Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'".

In the synoptic Gospels, verses 10-14 are unique to Luke. Luke tends to emphasize the lost and found motif, e.g. lost sheep, lost son, and the two disciples going the wrong way on the road to Emmaus. Now it is the lost who are coming to John, i.e., tax collectors and sinners, as they would later come to Jesus.

I am baptizing you with water. The people at the time would have recalled the words of the Prophet Ezekiel: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my spirit withing you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees." (Ez 36:25-27) .

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. Again, the people of the time would have recalled the above passage from the Prophet Ezekiel relative to God pouring out His Spirit into their hearts. They also would have recalled the passage of the refining fire from the Prophet Malachi: "Yes, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who will endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like the refiner's fire, or like the fuller's lye. He will sit refining and purifying, and he will purify the sons of Levi, refining them like gold and silver that they may offer due sacrifice to the Lord." (Mal 3: 1-3).

From the days of Pentecost, we recognize the Baptism of Spirit and Fire as the event of Pentecost, and the Baptism of Holy Mother Church.

Jesus was praying. This detail is only found in Luke's account of the Baptism of Jesus. Instead of mentioning that Jesus was coming out of the water, Luke points out Jesus in prayer. In Luke-Acts this is a recurring theme in the ministry of Jesus. So often important moments find Jesus in prayer, e.g., Lk 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 11:1; 22:41, 44-45; and 23:46.

Holy Spirit descended with the physical shape of a dove. Throughout Luke-Acts the Holy Spirit is prevalent. Already in Luke's Gospel the Holy Spirit has appeared 6 times, i.e., Lk 1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25, 26. This image evokes for me the image of the Spirit hovering over the waters of the creation story in Genesis. It is interestingly the second time in scripture that the dove appears. The dove was last seen as Noa sent the dove out to search for land not to return. Being that the Ark is a symbol of the Salvation of the Church, this could offer an interesting connection to Jesus and His Church. In some cultures, the dove is seen as a symbol of love, as doves typically pair and mate for life. It would seem to be a powerful symbol of God's love pouring into the world through Jesus.

A voice from heaven you are my beloved son. Unlike the voice from heaven during the Transfiguration that thundered *this is my beloved son*, God is speaking directly to Jesus for all of us to hear. Once again, we hear the promise of God's love, *agapetos*.

Reflection

This weekend we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Sunday our Gospel is scene of the Baptism of Jesus. John the Baptist was proclaiming a baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Thousands of people were entering the water of the Jordon River to have their sins washed away, to be cleansed and refreshed by the living water and to rise to newness of life.

Water is an ancient symbol of human life. The Holy Land is surrounded by very arid desert like terrain. People were very cognizant of the need for a water supply to sustain life. The people of the region typically lived near the several bodies of water in the area. Many made their living by fishing and the waters provided for their livelihood. The Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea were also known for their violent storms. Water was seen as both the giver and taker of life. Its power over life was well known to the people.

Once at a school Mass I asked the children why Jesus allowed Himself to be baptized, and I pointed out the fact that He was without sin. One little girl looked at me as if I had asked a really dumb question and said, "He had to go into the water to make the water holy." It was not the specific answer that I was looking for. It was a better answer. Jesus entered into the water to make the waters of baptism holy forever.

When Jesus entered the water of the Jordan River He entered fully into our humanity. The word Emmanuel is translated, "God is with us." The question is, "How is God with us"? God is with us in Jesus. Jesus emptied Himself to fully enter into our human condition. St. John Paul II used the word "solidarity" to describe how God is with us in Jesus. In Jesus, God enters into a deep solidarity with the human race. As Jesus entered into the Jordan River where sins are being washed away, He takes on our sins and will take those sins to the Cross. John the Baptist confirms this as he cries out, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

When Jesus came out of the water the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit was seen coming down upon Jesus in the form of a dove. The dove is an ancient symbol of love. God's love pours out upon the world and into humanity through Jesus who is now standing in solidarity with us. All things came into being through Him and God is now reconciling the world to Himself through Him, Jesus the Word made flesh. God's love is made visible in the incarnation. God's love enters into us through Jesus who is now with us standing in the waters of our lives.

As the Christmas season comes to a close, we must remember that our calling is to become the Body of Christ. We must become what we receive at the altar. We must allow the Holy Spirit to enter into us, to fill us and then allow that same Spirit to flow through us. And this is made possible by Jesus entering into the waters of our life. He shares in our humanity so that we may share in His divinity. We are the rest of the story of Christmas. The Christmas season must continue with us. We must become the incarnation of the Spirit. So come Holy Spirit and fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love.

Yours in Christ,



Personal Witness

I was blessed to attend the University of St. Mary of the Lake – Mundelein Seminary, Mundelein, Illinois from the fall of 1994 until graduation in the spring of 1999. During that time Cardinal Joseph Bernardine was Cardinal of the Archdiocese of Chicago. During my time at the seminary, until his death in November of 1996, Cardinal Bernardine was a frequent visitor and was on a first name basis with most of the students and faculty. He would often celebrate Mass with us and preach and then join the students for dinner after.

Cardinal Bernardine was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer early in 1995. He often shared his experiences and his struggles with the disease that would take his life at the age of 68. Near the end of his life, in the fall of 1996, he came to talk with us one last time to bless us and to say farewell. We met in the chapel and gathered around him as he sat in a wheelchair. He was very weak and struggling to speak above a whisper. He reminded us one more time to tell people how much God loves them and tell them often. He challenged us to be faithful to the Lord and faithful to our calling as priests. I have tried to do that throughout my priesthood. People that know me, know how often I remind them of God's powerful personal love them.

He shared with us his experience going through cancer treatments. During the time of his illness, he ended up spending a great deal of time in the hospital ministering to fellow cancer patients. He said that he had never felt so close to people in his entire life as the bond of love and solidarity that he felt with fellow patients going through shared struggles. He said that for the first time in his life he felt that he understood what the word Emmanuel really means. By entering into our human experience, by entering into the waters of our baptism, Jesus enters into solidarity with us. God humbles Himself to share our humanity in all things but sin. Jesus shares in our joys and our sorrows and our suffering and death. God with us means much more than His physical presence in our world. It means even more than an indwelling abiding presence within us. He allows Himself to become one of the patients as He takes on our infirmities. He becomes the wounded healer.

The Gospels reveal Jesus who has a deep love and compassion for us. Often, we hear the expression, "He was moved to the depth of His being." We saw Him weep at the sight of His friend Lazarus. In the Garden of Gethsemani Jesus exclaimed, "My soul is sorrowful unto death." Jesus experienced love betrayed, love rejected, and love crucified.

And so, Jesus, who had no sin, entered the waters of the Jordan. As Jesus entered into the river where sins are being washed away, He takes on our sins and will take those sins to the Cross. He is Savior because He is Emmanuel, because He is in deep solidarity with us.

