

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

The Baptism of the Lord | For Sunday, January 13th, 2019

The Messiah Is in Our Midst

Written by Douglas Sousa, S.T.L.

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Acts 10:34-38

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22



This Sunday, we end our Christmas celebration with the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. It marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry of preaching the good news of reconciliation for sinners. This feast reveals more of the mystery of Jesus and his mission. As Luke tells us, when Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit came down upon him and a voice booming from above declared that he was the Son of God and that the Father was pleased with him. God was declaring that the long-awaited Messiah was now in their midst.

Though the scene is majestic, there is another dimension to this baptism story. Anyone listening carefully to God's voice would have heard an echo of the ancient prophecies of Isaiah called the Servant Songs. Through the prophet Isaiah, God describes the Messiah as one with whom he is pleased and as the one upon whom he has placed his Spirit. This matches exactly the words spoken from heaven at Jesus' baptism. And so, God is pointing out to the people that Jesus is the servant whom Isaiah foretold many centuries earlier. In another of the Servant Songs, however, Isaiah prophesies that it would be through his suffering that this servant would bring about the salvation promised by God. We read these prophecies every year during Holy Week. The Messiah is described as a suffering servant who takes on the sins of the people and is rejected and persecuted. As Isaiah puts it, "By his stripes, we are healed" (Is 53:5).

Through these words, a little bit more of the mystery of Jesus is revealed. This Savior was destined to be rejected and to suffer death for our salvation.

Thankfully, Jesus' death is not the end of the story. That same Spirit which alighted on Jesus at his baptism raised him from the dead. That same Spirit came upon the Apostles and Mary, empowering them to pick up where Jesus left off and spread the Good News. We ourselves are the recipients of the promise made by John the Baptist when he said One was coming who would baptize us with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Each of us has received that fire of the Spirit through Baptism and Confirmation. The same Holy Spirit who came down upon Jesus was given to us. We were granted the forgiveness of our sins and the promise that the One who raised Jesus would raise us up to everlasting life. The same Spirit who ignited a fire in the Apostles has been given to us so that we can live and spread his word, not with our puny efforts but with the very power of God. All this is given to us who have believed in the name of Jesus and have been baptized in his Spirit. It is a Spirit that leads us out of fear and slavery into freedom.

And so this Sunday, we wrap up our celebration of Jesus' birth for another year. However, we commit ourselves once again to keeping the spirit of Christmas alive all year long. We do that, however, not by keeping our Christmas tree up or singing carols. We do that by living our baptism in the power of the Spirit we have received. We do that by calling others to recognize and accept the gift of salvation offered them in the person of Jesus. We do that by striving to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah to bring freedom to captives, sight to the blind, and food to the hungry. We do that by giving our lives over to Jesus, our Messiah, every day and by asking him to work wonders in our lives and in our world.

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PRAYER

Lord,
through baptism,
we have become your sons and daughters.
By the Spirit we have received,
we walk in newness of life.
Open our hearts continually to your Spirit
so that we can call captives to freedom,
the blind to new vision,
and the poor to claim their true dignity.
Walking by that Spirit,
may we find our way to your Kingdom,
where you live and reign forever and ever.
Amen.