

## The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

### Reading 1

[Is 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**

### Reading 1

[Is 55:1-11](#)

Thus says the LORD:

All you who are thirsty,  
come to the water!  
You who have no money,  
come, receive grain and eat;  
come, without paying and without cost,  
drink wine and milk!  
Why spend your money for what is not bread,  
your wages for what fails to satisfy?  
Heed me, and you shall eat well,  
you shall delight in rich fare.  
Come to me heedfully,  
listen, that you may have life.  
I will renew with you the everlasting covenant,  
the benefits assured to David.  
As I made him a witness to the peoples,  
a leader and commander of nations,  
so shall you summon a nation you knew not,  
and nations that knew you not shall run to you,  
because of the LORD, your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, who has glorified you.

Seek the LORD while he may be found,  
call him while he is near.  
Let the scoundrel forsake his way,  
and the wicked man his thoughts;  
let him turn to the LORD for mercy;  
to our God, who is generous in forgiving.  
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.  
As high as the heavens are above the earth  
so high are my ways above your ways  
and my thoughts above your thoughts.

For just as from the heavens  
the rain and snow come down  
and do not return there  
till they have watered the earth,  
making it fertile and fruitful,  
giving seed to the one who sows  
and bread to the one who eats,  
so shall my word be  
that goes forth from my mouth;  
my word shall not return to me void,  
but shall do my will,  
achieving the end for which I sent it.

### **Responsorial Psalm**

[Ps 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**

### **Responsorial Psalm**

[Is 12:2-3, 4bcd, 5-6](#)

**R. (3) You will draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation.**

God indeed is my savior;  
I am confident and unafraid.  
My strength and my courage is the LORD,  
and he has been my savior.  
With joy you will draw water  
at the fountain of salvation.  
**R. You will draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation.**  
Give thanks to the LORD, acclaim his name;  
among the nations make known his deeds,  
proclaim how exalted is his name.  
**R. You will draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation.**  
Sing praise to the LORD for his glorious achievement;  
let this be known throughout all the earth.  
Shout with exultation, O city of Zion,  
for great in your midst  
is the Holy One of Israel!  
**R. You will draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation.**

## **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**

## **Reading II**

[1 Jn 5:1-9](#)

Beloved:  
Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God,  
and everyone who loves the Father  
loves also the one begotten by him.  
In this way we know that we love the children of God  
when we love God and obey his commandments.  
For the love of God is this,  
that we keep his commandments.  
And his commandments are not burdensome,  
for whoever is begotten by God conquers the world.

And the victory that conquers the world is our faith.  
Who indeed is the victor over the world  
but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is the one who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ,  
not by water alone, but by water and blood.  
The Spirit is the one who testifies,  
and the Spirit is truth.  
So there are three that testify,  
the Spirit, the water, and the blood,  
and the three are of one accord.  
If we accept human testimony,  
the testimony of God is surely greater.  
Now the testimony of God is this,  
that he has testified on behalf of his Son.

## **Gospel**

[Mk 1:7-11](#)

This is what John the Baptist proclaimed:  
“One mightier than I is coming after me.  
I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.  
I have baptized you with water;  
he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee  
and was baptized in the Jordan by John.  
On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open  
and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him.  
And a voice came from the heavens,  
“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

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## HOMILY

Today's feast of the Baptism of Jesus is most confusing. We began our liturgical year last month with the story of John the Baptist, this great prophetic character of the New Testament, living in the desert, proclaiming that the reign of God was at hand, and asserting that the long awaited Messiah would finally come, bringing redemption to the people of Israel. We heard that people from throughout the countryside and even Jerusalem were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sinfulness and repented of the evil in their lives. It is against this background that we encounter Jesus, coming to John to be baptized in the Jordan. We hear this story and it makes little sense to us. In faith we proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God, became human, and in doing so, was like us in all things but sin. Clearly Jesus had no need to repent of evil and did not require the forgiveness of sin. Yet, he presented himself for baptism.

To understand the baptism of Jesus we must return to the image of John the Baptist, the importance of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the mission of Jesus. Recall that John the Baptist belong to the priestly tribe of Israel and his father, Zechariah, was a priest in the Temple. John would have been familiar with Temple practices and understood the significance of ritual sacrifice. As a priest in the Temple Zechariah would offer sacrifices so that humankind could finally be at peace with the divine. On the Day of Atonement, the day of when all devout Jews would reflect upon the past year and make reparations for the high priest would enter the Temple and carry with him the offerings of the people. As he entered the temple he wash himself. Only after he had been cleansed could he enter the very center of the Temple, the Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of God, the place where the human and the divine touched.

The ritual washing prepared the high priest for his mission. It made him ready to offer the sacrifices in the temple which would serve as a sign of God's mercy, humankind's willingness to return to God what God had provided, and the communities recommitment to banish evil from their midst. The significance of the ritual washing of Jesus in the Jordan by a priest of the old order would not have been lost on the first Jewish Christians. As high priest Jesus was now ready not to enter the temple in Jerusalem, but to be the new Temple. We will hear later this year from the Gospel of John that Jesus compared himself to the temple when he declared that he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. He would allow himself to be put to death and rise from the dead and proclaim hope for all who believe in him. His body, his physical presence within the world, became the space where human and divine became one. Jesus, the incarnation, the embodiment, the enfleshment of God became the Holy of Holies – the dwelling of God among us.

Although the significance of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan may make a little bit more sense with this understanding of ritual purity, Temple worship, and the sacrifice of atonement, it remains little more than an academic exercise if it is not taken one step further. The step we must take is to ask ourselves what difference this makes for us.

To understand the impact this has for each of us we return to the end of the Gospel of John. At the moment of the death of Jesus, the earth quaked and the curtain in the Temple was rent. The curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple was torn in two. All people gained access to the place where human and divine communed as one. The same word is used to describe the heavens opening and the Spirit descending upon Jesus in today's Gospel reading. The heavens were rent and a dove descended upon Jesus. The passage between

heaven and earth is opened and all humankind now has access to the heavenly realm of saints, and angels, and God.

This remains a wonderful theological treatise until we begin to live this reality and recognize that eternal life begins with our baptism. In our baptism God offers God's self to each of us and chooses to dwell within us. The place where human and the divine commune is no longer a Temple constructed of stone and wood but rather human temples of flesh and bone. As temples of God's Spirit we are invited to live deeply the reality to which we have already been welcomed – eternal life.

When we strengthen our embrace this reality through reflection and prayer, we begin to more fervently believe and act as if our lives have meaning. No longer do we remain as people adrift in some absurd human drama, we become more fully people with a defined purpose and promising future. With the rest of humankind we will continue to struggle poverty, hunger, destabilized financial markets, and nations and people at war. Our struggle, however, will not be characterized by cynicism or despair. We find ourselves curiously hopeful and willing to consider solutions that respect not only our personal needs but the needs of those with whom we share human life.

As our appreciation of the mystery of incarnation grows we begin to understand that our bodies matter. The gentleness of a human embrace expression love and concern becomes an expression of the love and concern of the God who has chosen to dwell deep within us. The physical needs of our brothers and sisters assume increasing prominence as we recognize more fully that our concern their health and well being, their safety and security reflect our belief in the mystery we celebrate during this Christmas season – that God has become one of us and through this mystery we are changed, and our fellow human beings share in this transformation.

Belief in this transformation compels to act as if our relationships can be the expression of a loving and caring creator, because indeed they are. And when it seems too difficult to believe that God has chosen us for such a lofty mission, when we find ourselves overwhelmed by the challenges we face as individuals and as a community, when it appears as if what we proclaim is too remote to matter we gather.

We gather to hear once again the message of God's unrelenting action in human history so that we may be renewed in our belief that God continues to act. We gather to look into the eyes of companions on this journey of discipleship to recognize that we are not alone but journey as a community that takes responsibility for one another and dares to enter the sacred space of the life of the other, and invite the other into the sacred spaces of our lives, families, and homes. We gather to experience once again the transformation of unworthy gifts into the very presence of God – Bread becoming the body of Christ given for our salvation, wine becoming the blood of the promise of redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

And in this transformation of bread and wine we are renewed in our own transformation – first begun and celebrated in baptism, and lived in each moment of human life, expressed in every human relationship, and strengthened as we Holy of Holies, the point where the person who is fully human and fully divine is made present to us – that our lives might be holy, and we may come to fullness of the divine promise.

*Rev. Joseph Benedict*

## HOMILY

There are times when most of us have been asked: "Are you listening?" There are times, too, when many of us have been asked: "Would you look at that?" Today's readings are about listening, hearing, and looking. In the readings for this Sunday we find model examples of people who listen to God.

Our first example is the prophet Samuel. In today's first reading from the First Book of Samuel, we meet Samuel at the very beginning of his glorious career. He is a youngster sleeping in the temple of the Lord. But as the rest of the reading makes quite clear, Samuel turns out to be someone who is very much awake spiritually. Already he can hear the word of God calling out to him. Only because of his lack of experience does he think he must be hearing his teacher, the elder priest Eli, calling out to him. Samuel is a quick learner. When the reading ends Samuel has developed an attentive response. He learned from his teacher Eli to say, "Speak, for your servant is listening." And listening to God is something Samuel did for the rest of his life. As the book tells us Samuel would not let any word from God be without effect in his life. If only that could have been said about so many others in the Bible and also could be said about each one of us.

Our next examples of good listening come from the gospel for this Sunday. As the passage begins, John the Baptist is standing with two of his disciples. We learn that one of the two disciples was Andrew the brother of Simon Peter. John the Baptist is a fine example of someone who listened to God. He never let himself get in the way. As we already know from the Prologue to this gospel (Jn 1:1-18) John the Baptist gave witness to the light. He was not the light but he gave witness to it. We are told that "John was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." (Jn 1:35-36) The message to the disciples was "Look, there is the Messiah."

They followed Jesus. Jesus then asked the disciples, "What do you want?" They answered "Where do you live?" "Come and see," he replied. On the surface this can be taken as a request to know the house or shelter in which Jesus is physically staying. But the Gospel of John is usually symbolic of something deeper. "Where are you staying?" refers more deeply to the inner consciousness of Jesus. The disciples felt a glimpse of something deeper in Jesus and they want to share it. Jesus says "Come and see." Come and share in my inner awareness, in my experience of reality. In this, Jesus invites them to the inner truth and life that is in him and comes through him. "They came and saw where he stayed; and they stayed with him that day." They visited him physically, but they experienced where he was interiorly and to some degree shared in his light. This is the gift that Jesus also wants to give to each one of us. He also asks us, "What do you want?" He invites us to "Come and see" in order to share his inner life and vision with us.

After one day Andrew is already tracking down his brother Simon to tell him about Jesus. It seems they have listened well to the Lord's testimony about his reason for coming into the world. Andrew tells his brother Simon that they have found the Messiah. Simon was interested enough to allow Andrew to bring him to Jesus. Jesus announces that Simon will one day carry the name Peter. And with that detail another fascinating narrative begins as we discover how Simon Peter learned to listen to God.

Both the first reading and the gospel are call-response narratives that invite us to reflect on our own ability to hear the voice of God and develop a total and faithful response. While our response to God is invited to be total, it is not always immediate. John's disciples responded at once, but Samuel was called four times.

God continues to call until we respond—and respond totally. Are we listening? Do we hear the call? Might we, like Samuel, learn to follow Eli's advice: "...if you are called, reply, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening'." (1Sm 3:9)

*Henry Ormond, O.Carm.*