



Revised by Fr. Ray Reitzel, C.R.

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BAPTISM OF THE LORD

January 11th, 2015

GATHERING TIME *(10-15 minutes)*

Introduction to the Word:

The Hallowed River (**source: Wikipedia**)

Hindus believe that rituals performed by the Ganges River (in India) multiply in their blessedness. The water of the Ganges is held to be so sacred that, while holding this water in the hand, no Hindu dares to lie or be deceitful. The ancient Hindu scriptures say that the sight, the name, **and the touch of Ganges water cleanses one of all sins**, and taking a dip in the holy river bestows heavenly blessings. Thus pilgrimages to the Ganges River are of utmost importance for the Hindu.

Every summer, **the Ganga Dashami festival** venerates the auspicious occasion of the descent of the sacred river to earth from heaven. On this day, a dip in the holy river invoking the goddess Ganga is said to cleanse all sins. A devotee worships by lighting incense and lamp, and offers sandalwood, flowers, and milk. Fishes and other aquatic animals are fed flour balls. We often see on TV this annual pilgrimage of hundreds of Hindus descending into the Ganges River to be washed of their sins, washing themselves, their clothes, and drinking the water. I relate this to **John the Baptist** when he baptizes people **in the Jordan River**, as a sign of their repentance and the forgiveness of their sins. His mission is to prepare these people to be ready to accept the Messiah who is so imminently near. In the Gospel today, Jesus the carpenter, from Nazareth approaches John to be baptized. Wow! What a moment.

A few important questions related to Jesus' baptism as well as our own:

- (a) Why was Jesus baptized in the first place if he was without sin
- (b) What is the connection between His baptism and my own?
- (c) Why is Jesus' baptism considered such a central image in the redemptive story?

Warm-up Activity (about 8-10 minutes):

If you were asked to identify one or more of your “major successes,” (i.e. accomplishments, challenges, or artistic endeavours) in your lifetime thus far, what might they be?

OR: *One thing you want to do or accomplish before you leave this planet is.....*

Take a few moments of quiet, then share, if you wish, your thoughts and experiences.

The Table of the Word

THEME

The work of Christmas – our “baptismal mission” – begins.

The Christmas season officially comes to an end today at the banks of the Jordan River with Jesus’ baptism by John. The Christmas trinkets have been packed away as we position ourselves for a new year. But the Messiah remains. The adult Jesus begins his precarious journey to Jerusalem. The good news as spoken by the angels has not been forgotten, while the wondrous mystery of Jesus’ story is still unfolding. Today the same Spirit that anointed Jesus for his mission empowers all of us, baptized in that same Spirit, to take up our own mission. That mission in the New Year is, in effect, a continuation of Jesus own: to seek and find the lost; to attend to the sick and the aged; to rebuild relationships in our families and among nations; and in time, to bring God’s justice and peace to all people everywhere.

Leader: Born again of water and the Holy Spirit, we celebrate our victory over sin.

Lord Jesus, you invite all nations into your Kingdom,

Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you free us from our sins,

Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you share with us your own divine life,

Lord, have mercy.

**Let us pray (together) **

O heavenly Father,

as we celebrate today the mystery of Jesus’ baptism in the river Jordan,

renew in us our own baptism: Pattern our lives on this Christ,

the One you have specially chosen, the One on whom your favour rests,

the Beloved with whom you are well pleased.

We ask this through Jesus, your Son and our brother. Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God’s Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving. Because it is a privileged time it is incumbent on us in the small group to proclaim God’s Word with due reverence, to be attentive to this proclamation, and respectful of the communal interaction. The facilitator has arranged for group members to proclaim the three readings.)*

FIRST READING (Isaiah 55:1-11)

Thus says the Lord: “Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. “See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.

See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

“Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked person forsake their way, and the unrighteous person their thoughts; let that person return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the one who eats, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (1 John 5:1-9)

Beloved: Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this 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 obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. There are three that testify: the spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Mark 1:7-11)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In his preaching he proclaimed, “*The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*”

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan River. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

And a voice came from Heaven, “*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

*(Allow five to ten minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection
on a meaningful word or thought.)*

COMMENTARY:

A common question and problem that arises relative to Jesus' baptism is **WHY?** Why would Jesus need or want to be baptized if he was without sin?

First of all, Jesus sets the **example for us** to follow Him into the waters of Baptism.

Secondly, I like the image of the Hindus washing themselves of sin in the Ganges River, and John the Baptist cleansing all his followers of sin in the Jordan River. Now just imagine how these rivers are polluted with the sins of all these people. **Jesus** walks into this water **and absorbs unto himself all the burdens, sufferings, and sins** of all humankind. John proclaims, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!" Jesus will be the sacrificial Lamb who dies on the altar of the cross for the sins of all people.

Thirdly, since Jesus absorbs all the sin in the water unto Himself, the water is purified, and now through the waters of Baptism, **a person** dies to all sin, is purified, **is regenerated into a new person** in the Risen Christ.

Fourthly, now we officially **live in two worlds**, the **material World**, of all the **passing** kingdoms of this earth, and the **spiritual World** of God's Kingdom and the Mystical Body of Christ which takes us to our final **eternal** home in Heaven.

Fifthly, the baptism of Jesus signals **the beginning of his public ministry** where he proclaims that the Kingdom of God has now arrived. And **now it is our mission** from our Baptism, and especially through the sacrament of Confirmation, to nourish our new life in Christ, and to proclaim the Kingdom to the many who are seriously lost in this world of many distractions. With Pope Francis we proclaim a God of love and mercy through our prayers, words and actions.

It is difficult to fathom **who we really are** as Christians. We humans **are so much more** than what we allow ourselves to be. Our human, and therefore limited, powers of cognition have difficulty grasping the fullness of these basic beliefs: the fact that we are made to God's image; that we are empowered by God's Spirit; that we share God's own life; that God has made us partners in his plan and mission for the world. As we slowly become aware of "who I really am", theologians speculate and wonder, "when does Jesus become aware of who he really is?"

Jesus' baptism, therefore, is at the heart of his mission to heal us. Just as we baptize children to announce a new future—a new kind of life for the human person—the baptism of Jesus signals the beginning of that new life. Wholly one with our condition, Jesus is hovered over by the very Spirit of God. The Father gazes upon Jesus when he is baptized by John, then says "This is my beloved in whom I am well pleased". In baptism we become one in Christ, the daughters and sons of God. The Father gazes on each of us and proclaims, "**This is my beloved daughter/son in whom I am well pleased!**"

The first reading from Isaiah reads: everyone who thirsts...who listens...who eats...

Hopefully they can get beyond the things of this world, and thirst for the love and mercy of God; can listen to the life-giving Word of God; can feed on the Bread of Life, Jesus in the Eucharist.

The reading continues "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is still near." Remind you of a hymn?

In the **second reading** John says, "everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ (the anointed one, the Messiah) has been born of God.....conquers the world. For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments." We might remember that anyone who is of "good will" (i.e. honestly thinks they are doing God's will) has the potential to receive the "Baptism of desire". In the Gloria we pray, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to people of good will!"

(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or a new idea.)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. "...with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11)

These words were spoken by God the Father of Jesus, at the time of his baptism. And because of Jesus, the same words are spoken to us-- challenging words that await our response.

- a) Reflect briefly on your activities this day, then name a few things you have done that would probably be pleasing to God. (Know that the Lord is happy when you boast in his name).
- b) Name a few projects you *observed* being done by others that would be pleasing to God.
- c) Name a few needs in your cities and communities that cry out for attention and action.

2. The dove's presence at Jesus baptism signals the beginning of a *new creation*—Jesus is making his official debut on the world's stage. This image is considered one of the central images of the redemptive *mystery*.

- a) Most of us are not comfortable with the notion of *mystery*. Take a few moments to identify a few of life's mysteries that you find most stunning.
- b) If you ever get the opportunity, which is the one mystery you would want "solved?"
- c) Life has its own "little" mysteries: comment briefly on one or more of the following sayings (little mysteries) that we experience every day:
 - Why do the rich get richer and the poor get poorer?
 - Why do we seem to hurt the ones we love?
 - Why do bad things happen to good people?
 - Why does God favour the poorest and the weakest?
 - Why do we act contrary to what we know is right?
 - Why are we so obsessed with war and annihilation of people and nations?

3. John poured the water and God sent the Spirit. This is the usual way the sacrament works—cooperation between God and us mortal men and women. **We perform the sign and God provides the grace.** There is cooperation here—a team effort is required. Alice Camille reminds us that our cooperation in the "grace" event is a very important part of the story, but one we commonly fail to understand or appreciate. We seem to be waiting for God to do all the work, while we sit on our hands doing little (*God's Word is Alive*, 1998).

- a) Talk about how some of us might be "sitting on our hands" in regard to accepting responsibilities for ministry in our parish communities
- b) It has been observed that some of the most active parishes in our country do not have a resident priest, yet the parish is thriving. What can we learn from this? Share your views.
- c) The Church keeps praying desperately for vocations—meaning, vocations to the clerical state, yet the response has often not been encouraging. In your judgment, what vocations to ministry, other than clerical, might be needed to administer and service the needs of our parish communities? Share your views on these timely but difficult questions.

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. The intent is to 'outreach' to the larger community. The facilitator should allow for a **moderate pause** between each of the numbered suggestions for reflection and action.)

1. **Word for the Week:**

Reflect often on these words this week and consider them spoken to you as they were to Jesus:

“This is my Son/Daughter, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased” (Gospel)

2. Suggestion for the week:

- a) Be mindful several times this week, as you go about your duties and attending to those in your charge that you are helping to complete “the Master’s work,” and pause from time to time to look on your work with a smile of gratitude.
- b) Is there something in your life you might be resisting, the pursuit of a dream, or allowing a wound to heal? Give in for now. Let God take you where the Spirit is prompting.

3. Intercessions: (Response: Lord, hear our prayer)

Leader: In prayer let us call on God who draws near to us in Christ, the Beloved One, on whom God’s Spirit rests.

That all who are baptized into the everlasting covenant may conquer the world by faith and transform it by love, we pray...

That nations who do not yet know God’s steadfast love may be moved by the witness of believers to seek and find the Lord, we pray...

That those estranged from God and from the community may forsake their sinful ways and return to the God of mercy who abundantly pardons, we pray...

That those unsatisfied by material gain, may thirst for fulfillment in seeking the “Bread of Life”, Jesus our Saviour, we pray...

That those in our religious education and sacramental preparation programs may incline their ears to the word of life and find delight in Jesus, the Bread of Life, we pray ...

That all the departed who believed in Jesus as the Christ may share fully in the victory of eternal life, and resurrection, we pray...

That the people who make their home in the Holy Land – Jews, Muslims and Christians – mindful of a common God and Father – may not give up on their quest for justice and peace, but find ways to live life together with mutual acceptance, forgiveness and love, we pray...

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray (together)

O Holy One of Israel, to the waters you call all those who thirst. As once at the Jordan your Spirit tore open the heavens, and your voice proclaimed Jesus your well-beloved Son, so now call us by name, your beloved sons and daughters; lead us by your Spirit so that our love for you may strengthen us to obey your commandments, and our love for one another be the victory that forever conquers the world. We ask this thorough Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us—your Son who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever. Amen.

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God’s favours on us today, we pray that all those persons whom we may influence, be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit. We pray

OUR FATHER...

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (Celebrating the Word was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R., now deceased). Toll Free: 1-877-242-7935. Email: theword@celebratingtheword.com website: www.resurrectionists.ca