

Okay, that was fun, wasn't it? Right after Thanksgiving, while the world busied itself with the hustle and bustle of the Christmas holiday season, in church with the season of Advent, we prepared for the coming of the baby Jesus. Then on Christmas day, we remembered the very special birth of our Savior, the newborn King, announced by angels and visited by wise men from far away.

This last bit was this past Sunday, celebrated as the Epiphany of our Lord, when the shepherds and the three wise men came from far away to worship Jesus. There's a word: *Epiphany*. Epiphany comes from the Greek *epiphainein* meaning revelation. When you have an epiphany, the meaning of something you are trying to figure out suddenly is revealed to you. Have you ever had an "a-ha! moment"? That's when all of a sudden, you get it, whatever it is you are trying to understand, and you might say, "A-ha! I've got it!" The Epiphany of our Lord celebrated last week is when everyone, including the shepherds, the wise men, and even King Herod, all had their "A-ha! moments" when they came to realize that Jesus was the "newborn king." But the Epiphany of Jesus is not restricted to the time of His birth. Two other Epiphanies include the Epiphany to Jesus' family and friends at the wedding at Cana when He changed water into wine, and the Epiphany at His baptism in the Jordan River, which brings us to...

Today, the feast of the baptism of our Lord, which marks the end of the Christmas season *and* the beginning of Ordinary Time. Advent and Christmas (& Hallowe'en & Thanksgiving & New Year's Day) have come and gone, which means no regularly scheduled consumption of mass quantities of food until Super Bowl Sunday. Anyway, we are back to Ordinary Time. There's a word. *Ordinary*, as in Ordinary Time. It's called Ordinary Time from the Latin, *ordinare*, which means to put into order or to count. It's not Advent or Christmas anymore. It's not Lent or Easter yet (that'll be here soon enough). It's not a feast day. It's Ordinary

Time, not because there's anything ordinary about it. All Sundays are special. We get an opportunity to commune with our Lord, which is a very Holy Communion. There's nothing ordinary about that. So today, the day we celebrate the baptism of our Lord, does double duty as the beginning of Ordinary Time.

Remembering that Jesus is always with us, now that He is "with us" with His birth we just celebrated in church, we turn our attention (from now until Lent) to what He is supposed to be doing while He walks on the earth. Jesus' ministry began with His baptism in the Jordan River. How did He know that? Even when Jesus was young, He knew he had a connection with His heavenly Father. Remember when Mary and Joseph finally found the young boy Jesus in the temple in Jerusalem, He said to them, "Did you not know I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49)

Today's first reading comes from the prophet Isaiah. We hear from the prophet Isaiah throughout the liturgical year. In fact, Jesus most certainly read today's reading from Isaiah; He probably read it many times. Today we are going to read the same book of the prophet Isaiah that Jesus read. That's even a little exciting, when you think about it. Let's see if we can hear what Jesus heard Isaiah say.

A reading from the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7).

Here is my servant! I have made him strong. *He is my chosen one, and I am pleased with him.* ¶ I will give him my Spirit, and he will bring justice to the nations. He won't shout or yell or call out in the streets. He won't quit or give up until he brings justice to all the earth, and people in foreign lands long for his teaching. ¶ I, the Lord, chose you because of my kindness, and I am here at your side. I created and appointed you to bring light and my promise of hope to the nations. You will give sight to the blind and set prisoners free from dark dungeons.

In this reading, many scholars believe Isaiah was speaking about the Messiah, the Christ, the Lord, in other words, Jesus. So Jesus reading this passage from Isaiah would see, "Here is my servant...He is my chosen one, and I am pleased with him," and hear this word of God speaking directly to Him, that He was to "bring light and My promise of hope to all nations...[to] give sight to the blind and set prisoners free." There is work and perhaps even pain in what lies ahead for Him.

Now let's turn our attention to our Psalm for today, Psalm #29 (Psalm 29 :3abde-4, 3cde and 9ef-10).

The Lord will bless His people with peace.

The Lord will bless His people with peace.

The voice of the Lord echoes over the oceans. He thunders above the roar of the raging seas, and his voice is mighty and marvelous.

The Lord will bless His people with peace.

The glorious Lord God thunders above the roar of the raging seas, and the temple is filled with shouts of praise. The Lord rules on his throne, king of the flood forever.

The Lord will bless His people with peace.

Twice in the psalm it refers to the voice of the Lord "thunder[ing] above the roar of the raging seas." Remember this image of the voice of God and thunder.

Our second reading comes as it always does from the New Testament, and the reading usually comes from St. Paul. Except not today. Today's second reading comes from the Acts of the Apostles.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 10:34-38)

Peter said to Cornelius and his household: “Now I am certain that God treats all people alike. God is pleased with everyone who worships him and does right, no matter what nation they come from. This is the same message that God gave to the people of Israel, when he sent Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, to offer peace to them. ¶ “You surely know what happened everywhere in Judea. It all began in Galilee after John had told everyone to be baptized. God gave the Holy Spirit and power to Jesus from Nazareth. He was with Jesus, as he went around doing good and healing everyone who was under the power of the devil.”

St. Peter is talking to Cornelius and his relatives right before their baptism. They were gentiles, which means they were not Jews (just like you and me). It describes the beginning of Jesus’ ministry for all people, Gentiles and Jews, a realization Peter had while he was visiting Cornelius, a devout Gentile.

And now the gospel acclamation and gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia. Alleluia, alleluia.

The heavens were opened, and the Father’s voice thundered:
This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.

Alleluia, alleluia.

+ A reading from the holy gospel according to St. Luke (Luke 3:15-16, 21-22).

Everyone became excited and wondered, “Could John be the Messiah?” ¶ John said, “I am just baptizing with water. But someone more powerful is going to come, and I am not good

enough even to untie his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” ¶ After everyone else had been baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. Then as he prayed, the sky opened up, and the Holy Spirit came down upon him in the form of a dove. A voice from heaven said, “You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with you.”

We read about John the Baptist just four weeks ago during the third Sunday of Advent. As was foretold by the prophet Isaiah (Is 40:3-5), he went about the task of preparing the way for the Lord by baptizing people with water. At the very beginning of today’s gospel reading, what does John say when he is asked if he could be the Messiah? “I am just baptizing with water. Someone more powerful...will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” And then *he* baptizes Jesus. And out of the sky came the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. And above it all we hear the voice of God from heaven say, “You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with You.” (Recall the second sentence of today’s first reading from Isaiah.) So altogether at the same time we had God the Father’s voice (recall today’s psalm), God the Son being baptized, and God the Holy Spirit, the dove, coming out of the sky. The Father, the Son, & the Holy Spirit altogether at the same time, one of only two times that happens in the Bible, the other time at the Transfiguration, which is a discussion for another time.

Jesus, of course, knew what He was supposed to be doing on this earth by the time John announced it to the people at the Jordan River. He listened to God the Father to know. And if we listen carefully to God through Isaiah, through Sts. Peter & Paul, through St. John the Baptist, through the Bible, we also can learn what we are supposed to do while we are here.

And that, girls and boys, is the lesson in today’s readings. Speak about it with your parents.

Now instead of the Creed, on the feast of our Lord's baptism, it is customary in the church that we renew *our* baptismal vows, which you obviously don't remember because at your baptism you were babies, so your godparents answered for you. Today it is your turn. To each of the questions you respond, "I do." Read it carefully. After the first three questions, it should all start to sound pretty familiar.

Do you reject Satan?

R. I do.

And all his works?

R. I do.

And all his empty promises?

R. I do.

Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth?

R. I do.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?

R. I do.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

R. I do.

God, the all-powerful Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has given us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and forgiven all our sins. May he also keep us faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ for ever and ever.

R. Amen.

The Baptism of Our Lord, 2023,
Joseph Calderone