



January 9, 2022

Christmastime—the Baptism of Our Lord

"Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am well pleased..." Isaiah 40:1

Dear Friends;

Christ is born!

All four Gospels have a problem. They need to explain why Jesus (the sinless One) was baptized by John in the river Jordan. At first, it seems that Jesus may have been a follower of John. Jesus steps forward to be baptized. In the Gospel of Matthew, John protests Jesus' desire to be baptized. Jesus talks John into going along with him "to fulfill God's will." So why was Jesus baptized?

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance meant to prepare the people for God's coming Kingdom. John was baptizing near the site where the children of Israel entered the Land of the Promise for the first time. The place where John is baptizing is a protest. John was saying that they had to start over.

The Temple, the priesthood, the leaders were corrupted. John the Baptist with no little amount of fire and brimstone preached judgment and repentance. He called the leaders a "*brood of snakes*." And the people were asking themselves whether John might be the expected Christ. And for centuries after John had been martyred, there was a group that continue to hold that he was the Messiah, the Christ.

All the Gospels try to explain the baptism of Jesus. The answer to the question is also the same reason that the Word of God submits to become human in the Incarnation. Jesus Christ comes to us as the humble Servant of God who "*a bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering candle wick he will not extinguish...*" (Isaiah 40:3) Jesus comes to accompany us in our journey as we are and in our brokenness. That is why he came and that is why he is baptized.

The Gospel accounts of the baptism tell us that Jesus has an ecstatic vision. The heavens are torn open and the Spirit/divine breath physically descends on Jesus. In the simple cosmology of the first century it was thought that the sky was a dome, like an upside down bowl, that covered the flat earth. Above the dome were God and the heavenly host. The sky represented the division between God and humankind. The symbol of the sky opening up means that there is no division between God and us.

Jesus is revealed as God's loving self-communication. Out of this sense of being God's beloved child, Jesus heals the sick, forgives sinners, eats with outcasts and spreads the good word that God has chosen to live among us. Jesus gifts that sense of belovedness to all who are baptized into Christ. Our baptism is our conscious proclamation that we too are God's daughters and sons in whom God is pleased.

Many of us feel uncomfortable with this Good News. We think that it seems a little too soft, or a bit too lenient. We are, truth to be told, more comfortable with the judgment and condemnations of John the Baptist than with the persuasive force of self-giving love. We want a system of meritocracy, then we can fool ourselves into thinking that we have earned what we have. And those without any means have gotten what they deserve. Everything stays the same.

Even John will question whether Jesus was the Christ. John was looking for the punishing God, not a gentle God. He sends his disciples to ask Jesus if he is the One for whom they are waiting. Jesus responds tell John what they see Jesus doing, "*The blind recover their sight, cripples walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the poor have the Good News preached to them. Blest is the one who finds no stumbling block in me.*" (Luke 7:19) The God revealed in Jesus is not a God of destructive wrath and punishment. The God of Jesus walks with us, loves us, heals us, and freely gives us gifts without measure. As beloved children of God those gifts can also flow from us.

Peace!

Fr Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.anne.church