

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

By Al Mansfield

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Psalm 29

Acts 10:34-38

Matthew 3:13-17

ALLOW IT FOR NOW

The sinless Son of God submitted to a baptism of repentance before beginning His public ministry. Jesus literally "pitched his tent among us" (cf. John 1:14). He who would humble himself to accept the baptism of the cross began by accepting baptism from John. We close out the Christmas season today with yet another sign that God became man in Jesus, our Emmanuel - God with us.

ISAIAH

Isaiah describes the "Servant of the Lord," with whom God is pleased - reminiscent of the words the Father speaks over Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan.

This reading further references the Messiah's ministry of opening the eyes of the blind and bringing freedom to those in prison and darkness.

The Responsorial, Psalm 29, praises God for his "mighty voice" and his enthronement as king forever.

GOSPEL

The baptism of Jesus is recorded in all four gospels. Matthew's account, which is read today, is the only one to relate John's attempt to "prevent him" with the protest, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?" The response of Jesus indicates his firm resolve: "Allow it for now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

In Matthew's gospel, the Father's voice from heaven says, "This is my beloved Son...", whereas in Mark and Luke, Jesus is addressed directly, "You are my beloved Son...".

All the gospels recount that the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus as a dove. We have noted before that John's baptism was one signifying repentance and did not impart the Holy Spirit. Jesus, however, is the Anointed Anointer and, as John declares in all four gospels, he will "baptize with the Holy Spirit." Jesus himself alludes to this in Acts 1:5 just prior to his Ascension, "John baptized with water, but not many days from now, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

ACTS

Just as the Baptism of Jesus was a significant event in his life and ministry, the "Cornelius event" described in Acts 10 was very significant for the early Church.

This is sometimes called the "Gentile Pentecost," because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Roman household, evidenced by their "speaking in tongues and glorifying God." Peter then orders them to be baptized, thereby opening the door for Gentiles to become Christians without first embracing Judaism.

This reading specifically mentions "the baptism that John preached," and that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power."

THE BRIDGE

In some ways, John the Baptist was like a bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. When Jesus said, "Allow it for now," it reminds us of his saying that he came "not to abolish the Law or the Prophets...but to fulfill them" (cf. Matt. 5:17). Jesus completely fulfilled the Old Law even as he instituted the New Law in the Holy Spirit.

On this concluding feast of the Christmas season, may we imitate his humility, obedience and zeal. Lord Jesus, baptize us in your Holy Spirit!