

The Baptism of the Lord Year C January 13, 2013

Theme: What happened on Jordan's Bank?

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Something happened down there on the banks of the Jordan River that began the transformation of Jesus of Nazareth into Jesus the Christ.

All of the Gospels report the event.

Even the Acts of the Apostles, as we heard today, refers to it.

What happened to Jesus of Nazareth down at the Jordan River that day?

This year we heard the account of Luke's Gospel and, unlike the other Gospel accounts, Luke simply wrote: **"After all the people had been baptized and Jesus had also been baptized and he was praying..."**

Luke for some reason downplayed the role of John the Baptizer as well as the actual moment of baptism and situated the event of divine election within Jesus' prayer:

"Heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.'"

The image most artists have painted is that of John the Baptist pouring water over Jesus or dunking him in the Jordan while the dove of the Spirit descends on him from heaven.

Luke's picture is quite different: John is nowhere to be found; the baptism is over; and Jesus is alone and praying when the voice is heard and the dove descends.

Whichever picture you prefer, it was his baptism and the experience of divine election that followed which began to transform Jesus of Nazareth into Jesus the Christ.

What we mean by this is private citizen Jesus living quietly in Nazareth begins to be transformed into the servant of God living quite publicly and becoming the crucified and risen Lord in whom we believe.

From his baptism and the experience of divine election there at the Jordan, Jesus of Nazareth takes up the ministry and the role that leads to his exaltation as Lord and Christ.

We also had today a profoundly beautiful and powerful text from the second part of the prophet Isaiah which envisions how the ancient prophet envisioned this divine election.

The text comes to us from about five to six hundred years before Christ and was written to a people who looked desperately for someone to lead them.

**“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.”**

Notice how the Gospels used exactly the same words and images: with whom I am pleased; upon whom I have put my spirit.

The prophet continued:

**“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.”**

God’s servant shall establish justice with complete non-violence.

He will come with gentleness and compassion, not force and terror.

Then the prophet shifts to make the prophecy more directly personal:

“I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasp you by the hand and I have formed you.”

Imagine what it would have been for private citizen Jesus to realize in the quiet of his prayer along the banks of the Jordan, these words were meant for him; he was the one called and elected by God for the **“victory of justice.”**

Or as Second Isaiah goes on with a specific job description:

**“I formed you and set you:
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.”**

Imagine the prospect of such a task set out before you.

Yet such is precisely the mission to which Jesus of Nazareth dedicated his life.

Assured of the approval and support of the Father whose Son he was and energized by the Spirit who had descended upon him, Jesus took up the work of justice.

Though it would lead him first to passion and death on a cross finally, we know, it brought him to resurrection and exaltation.

Now, he who was simply Jesus of Nazareth became Jesus, the Christ, Lord, for ever and ever. Amen.