

Sunday 8th January 2016

The Baptism of Christ

The First Sunday of Epiphany



Collect

Eternal Father, who at the baptism of Jesus revealed him to be your Son, anointing him with the Holy Spirit: grant to us, who are born again by water and the Spirit, that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Acts 10:34-43 English Standard Version (ESV)

Gentiles Hear the Good News

10³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.³⁶ As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),³⁷ you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed:³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.³⁹ And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree,⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear,⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.⁴² And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

COMMENT: Peter’s sermon to the household of Cornelius, the Roman centurion in Caesarea, may seem a strange lesson to be read instead of the alternate Old Testament selection. The thrust of Peter’s message, however, is the central theme of Easter. The resurrection of Jesus confirmed for all people and for all time that he is Lord of all (vs.38). The setting in a Gentile officer’s quarters, the assembled audience, mostly Gentiles to whom this Good News was proclaimed, and the linking of gospel and prophecy underline the universality of Peter’s message. Though Peter is the spokesperson and his sermon as succinct a summary of the gospel as Acts provides, Cornelius is brought into focus. As an “upright and god-fearing” Gentile “well-spoken of by the whole Jewish nation” (vs. 22), he bridges the gap between Judaism and Christianity. He represents the new reality that the Christian gospel introduced and yet maintained the rooting of the new in the seed-bed of the old. By seeking out and summoning Peter, listening to Peter’s sermon and accepting baptism with all his household, Cornelius symbolizes the distinctive element of the Christian gospel: God intends all people to receive the Holy Spirit and the gift of eternal life on the same basis, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, not through obedience to the law.

Matthew 3:13-17 English Standard Version (ESV)

The Baptism of Jesus

3¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him,^[a] and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son,^[b] with whom I am well pleased.”

Footnotes: a. some manuscripts omit *to him*. b. or *my Son, my (or the) Beloved*.

COMMENT: This simple story of Jesus’ baptism reveals the humility Jesus. He identified with sinners. In Matthew’s version of the baptism, only Jesus saw the Spirit descend as a dove and heard God’s voice. This follows Mark’s narrative, but both Luke and John give a different view of the experience. Luke told of it as an impartial observer of the incident would do, probably because the matter did not seem important to him or he had no independent tradition on which to base this detail. (Luke 3:21-23).

John, however, stated specifically that it was John the Baptist who saw “the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove” and for him this was the sign that Jesus was the Son of God to whom he was to bear witness (John 1:32-34). Of course, such a distinct presentation of the same incident served the specific purposes of the different authors. While Matthew did not refer to the Old Testament passages, the concept contained in the words, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased,” are undoubtedly a combination of phrases from Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1. Matthew intended them to be interpreted as confirmation of Jesus’ messianic role. In this passage the baptism by John was the point in his life when Jesus recognized his true vocation.

Psalm 29 *Afferte Domino* Grail Psalter

℟ The Lord will bless his people with peace.

¹ O give the Lord, you sons of God,
give the Lord glory and power;

² give the Lord the glory of his name.

Adore the Lord in his holy court. **℟**

³ The Lord's voice resounding on the waters,
the Lord on the immensity of waters;

⁴ the voice of the Lord, full of power,
the voice of the Lord, full of splendour. **℟**

⁵ The Lord's voice shattering the cedars,
the Lord shatters the cedars of Lebanon;

⁶ he makes Lebanon leap like a calf
and Sirion like a young wild ox. **℟**

⁷ (The Lord's voice flashes flames of fire.)

⁸ The Lord's voice shaking the wilderness,
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh;

⁹ the Lord's voice rending the oak tree
and stripping the forest bare. **℟**

^{3b} The God of glory thunders.

¹⁰ In his temple they all cry: “Glory!”

The Lord sat enthroned over the flood;
the Lord sits as king for ever. **℟**

¹¹ The Lord will give strength to his people,
the Lord will bless his people with peace.

℟ The Lord sits as king for ever.

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: In descriptive metaphors the psalmist ‘sees’ and ‘hears’ God during a fierce thunderstorm while worshiping in the temple. This causes the worshipers to praise the glory of God, envisioned as a monarch on a throne giving peace to his subjects.

Short Preface

And now we give you thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord, whose willing submission to the way of righteousness is the pattern of our calling to be his people and live in his way.

Post Communion

Lord of all time and eternity, you opened the heavens and revealed yourself as Father in the baptism of Jesus your beloved Son: by the power of your Spirit complete the heavenly work of our rebirth through the waters of the new creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Blessing

May God, who in Christ gives us a spring of water welling up to eternal life, perfect in you the image of his glory; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**