

## Reflection on the Sunday Readings

# THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

### Baptism: A Beginning

Baptism signaled the beginning of Jesus' ministry. It signals the beginning of ours as well. For us, baptism begins at the font, but it doesn't end there. Baptism is promise, not fulfillment. Baptism is for growth, growth into communion with all others who have been baptized. When we are immersed in the waters of baptism, we rise because of God's "favor;" we rise by a "given" energy not our own. We name that life force the Holy Spirit. What does baptism say to us? Baptism says, "You don't have to be your own leader, a self-made person. You don't have to rely only on yourself to be successful." In the community of the Church, all the baptized find security, service, success, and wondrous favor.

*FIRST READING: Isaiah 40:1–5, 9–11    RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 104:1b–2, 3–4, 24–25, 27–28, 29–30*  
*SECOND READING: Titus 2:11–14; 3:4–7    GOSPEL: Luke 3:15–16, 21–22*

### Comment

The people who approached John for baptism were poised and ready. They were on the lookout for the coming of a new leader, king, and liberator. John quickly informed them that he was not the one they were looking for, that a mightier one than he would be coming soon with a baptism of Spirit and fire. The reference to fire here recalls ancient covenants and purifications in which objects were cleansed by being passed through fire. It also recalls God's presence, which was frequently accompanied by fire. John wanted his listeners to realize that baptism with fire means both a complete purification and also the presence of God (the Holy Spirit) in all those so purified.

The Gospel goes on to recount how the Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus, designating him the long-awaited Messiah. Perhaps all the people gathered at the Jordan didn't realize that Jesus was more than a human servant, but the Spirit's words were understood by those who preached after Pentecost and by the author of today's Gospel, who uses the word "Son" quite pointedly.

As the new calendar year begins, the story of the necessary baptism of Jesus signals his journey from life to death. This first revealing chapter of Jesus' life story and its meaning is set before us. This story will be told and understood through the bright light of the Resurrection. We are invited to take it all in and make it ours. What a marvelous favor!

### Reflection

This Sunday brings the Christmas season to a close. It brings the reality of God-with-us, "Emmanuel," as close as it can get. This Sunday, the liturgy exhorts us to recall our identification with Christ. Making the life of this redeeming, gentle Servant and Son our own life means living our baptism, our "Christening." Because we have been baptized into his death and resurrection, we, too, are servants and sons or daughters of God. This is our gift or "favor." We are the beloved ones, no matter what we do or how well or how badly we act as God's beloved. Together we pray to be faithful to our baptismal identification with God's Son, to follow his path of service, and to be as open to God as God is to us.

As baptized Christians, we have been favored with a share of the light and life of Jesus, God's "favored One." Being favored means many things: it means basking in grace; it means traveling a holy path; it means journeying to eternal life in light. It also means being busy about what baptized people do. Being favored means sharing the favor. And we can't do this in the abstract. We have to give of ourselves to others as Jesus did.

We must heal the sick, reach out to the poor, challenge evil, and even die for one another if that is called for—and it most surely is. This week, let's do someone a favor: send some flowers to a nursing home, donate some good used clothes to a free store or women's shelter, write a legislator about an important bill that's pending, refuse to put up with prejudice, give some special thanks for baptism, and remember how favored we are.

# Reflection on the Weekday Readings

## MONDAY, JANUARY 11

### Can you hear me now?

The telecommunications industry would have us believe that the most important connections we make are via computer and cell phone. While it's true that these devices are useful in today's world, there remains the crucial connection with that still, small voice within our own hearts that no computer can reach. That voice, which is God's, can only be heard in stillness: in the bare branches of trees against a clear blue winter sky, the quiet of new-fallen snow, the starry brilliance in a winter night sky, our breathing in and breathing out. What is God calling you to do now? Spend some time today just listening.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Samuel 1:1-8; Mark 1:14-20*  
*"And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me.'"*

## TUESDAY, JANUARY 12

### Call waiting

National Vocation Awareness Week began with the celebration of the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, which marks Jesus' initiation into public ministry. There are many ways to serve God, many vocational paths. Pray for men and women in your parish and diocese who are discerning their vocation and encourage them. You might also send a card to a priest or consecrated person this week, thanking them for their ministry to you and the church. Then take a step further and live out your own call as fully as you can.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Samuel 1:9-20; Mark 1:21-28*  
*"The people were astonished at his teaching."*

## WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 13

### Did you hear a voice?

Very often a person professing vows as a member of a religious community will choose the story of Samuel in the temple as the first reading for the service. In tried-and-true storytelling fashion, three times young Samuel mistakes the voice of God for that of his mentor, Eli. After the third time the elder recognizes that persistent voice and tells the boy that the next time he hears it he must answer, "Here I am, Lord. Speak, your servant is listening." That's the response of anyone open to the "still, small voice" that is God's, so easily drowned out, so easily misunderstood. In the middle of Vocation Awareness Week we remember that *vocation* means a "call," and God's call is not addressed only to beginners. The road is long, and if we've chosen that narrow path with Christ, we need continual course-correction, continual attention to that voice and awareness that today's journey must be guided by God alone.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-20; Mark 1:29-39*  
*"Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy."*

## THURSDAY, JANUARY 14

### Bad examples

The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were the trusted priests of the ancient temple in Shiloh. But they were dipping into the collection, tapping the till, so to speak. That's why the army of Israel got hammered by the Philistines, and Hophni and Phinehas got theirs. Not only that, but the Philistines took the ark of God captive. *Now* what will Israel do? Don't worry, they get it back. And it's a great story. It should inspire us to pray for vocations, men and women to serve the Lord in truth and integrity.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Samuel 4:1-11; Mark 1:40-45*  
*"The ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died."*

## FRIDAY, JANUARY 15

### Get going

There's a lot in life that can get us down. Sometimes things of our own making, and sometimes, well, it's life. It's not always easy to know what to do. We can stand still and try to figure it out, or we can try to backtrack to see what happened. At some point, however, it is time to move—to step out of what happened and to imagine something new. There's no magic trick to moving on, and there's no one-size-fits-all solution. But there is one thing we *can* do: Begin.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Samuel 8:4-7, 10-22a; Mark 2:1-12*  
*"Stand up and take your mat and walk."*