

## The Baptism of the Lord

### ■68th Session: Sharing the Word

#### ●First Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

This passage, often referred to as Second Isaiah, contains prophecies concerning the Babylonian Exile.

God commands Isaiah to speak comfort to the people of Israel. This “comfort” signifies their liberation from the Babylonian captivity and the forgiveness of their sins. The repeated command “Comfort, comfort my people” emphasizes the certainty of God’s promise. God declares that the sins of Israel have been atoned for, their time of trial has ended, and calls for preparations for the coming of the Messiah.

This is similar to John the Baptist fulfilling his role as the forerunner of Jesus in the New Testament (Matthew 3:3). The lowering of mountains and hills, the leveling of rough paths, and the widening of narrow roads symbolize repentance. Through repentance, God prepares the way for all people to partake in His salvation, revealing His glory and power.

Isaiah calls the people of Israel to climb high mountains and boldly proclaim the good news of salvation to many. God’s power symbolizes His authority and salvation, heralding the reign of God as a mighty king. The image of God as a shepherd portrays Him as a gentle and loving guide who protects and leads His flock with care.

#### ●Second Reading: Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

Salvation from God is offered to all people through Jesus. The passage teaches us to renounce worldly desires, live pious lives in this world, and place our hope in the Second Coming of the Lord, avoiding an obsession with material possessions.

Through Jesus’ sacrificial death, we are freed from sin and made pure, instructed to be zealous for good works. God’s salvation is not based on our deeds but is entirely an act of His mercy and grace. Through baptism, we are united with God, richly blessed by the Holy Spirit, and given new life, fostering a close relationship with Him.

Being justified before God, we become heirs of eternal life, which is the ultimate hope for believers.

[About Titus]

1. Titus was tasked with appointing elders on Crete, a place influenced by other cultures and plagued with bad habits (Titus 1:5, 12).
2. He served as a role model, guiding believers to live devoutly (Titus 2), testify to God (Titus 2:7-8), and strengthen the church’s foundation.
3. He was a close collaborator of Paul, participated in the Jerusalem Council (Galatians 2:1-3), and supported the church in Corinth (2 Corinthians 8:16-17).

[A Pious Life Includes]

1. Learning God’s Word and striving to live as He desires (Psalm 119:11), practicing love for neighbors (Mark 12:31), and daily self-reflection.
2. Seeking the Holy Spirit’s guidance to recognize personal sins (Psalm 139:23-24), acknowledging one’s weaknesses, avoiding slavery to desires, and finding contentment.
3. Confessing sins (1 John 1:9), truly repenting, returning to the Lord, living in response to God’s love, and maintaining gratitude.

#### ●Gospel Reading: Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

The people were eagerly awaiting the Messiah and wondered if John the Baptist might be the one. John clarified that he baptized with water, but the Messiah, who is greater, would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (explained on the 3rd Sunday of Advent).

When Jesus was baptized by John, it signified: ① Taking His place among the people (Hebrews 4:15). ② Fulfilling all

righteousness (Matthew 3:14-15).③Marking the beginning of His public ministry as the Son of God.

This event revealed God's plan of salvation and declared Jesus as its central figure. The voice from heaven affirmed the special relationship between God and Jesus, marking the commencement of His ministry and clearly proclaiming His divinity and mission.

[Reasons for the Messianic Expectation]

1.In 63 BC, Rome conquered Judea, imposing heavy taxes and depriving the people of their freedom, leading to hopes for liberation from Roman rule.

2.Prophesies of the Messiah restoring Israel (Isaiah 9:6?7, Jeremiah 23:5?6) fueled their longing for fulfillment.

Author: Akinori Kamachi      Translation: AI