

The Baptism of the Lord

■ The 120th Sharing of the Word

● First Reading: Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

This passage is known as the “Song of the Servant of the Lord.” It proclaims hope: even in the darkness of the Babylonian Exile, God never abandons the people of Israel, and His saving hand is extended also to the Gentiles. God’s justice is not brought about by “power,” but is quietly and faithfully revealed to the world through the “Servant.” This Servant is Jesus Himself, through whom salvation is fulfilled (Matthew 12:18-21). God chooses this Servant, upholds Him with delight, and pours out His Spirit upon Him. Through God’s work, the mission of the Servant is accomplished, and justice is brought to all nations of the world.

The Servant does not assert Himself nor stir up the crowds, but walks quietly and humbly. He refers to sinners, the sick, and those excluded from society as “a bruised reed” and “a smoldering wick,” and He never abandons them, but patiently stays close to them. Though the Servant encounters suffering, He does not relinquish His mission, and even the distant lands the “islands” wait in hope for His teaching. These words are also a prophecy of the path Jesus would walk toward the cross.

The Servant Himself becomes “the covenant,” fulfilling the covenant between God and the people of Israel, and at the same time becoming “a light to the nations.” Spiritual blindness is opened, and through liberation from the bonds of sin, fear, and despair, healing and forgiveness are realized. The Messiah who “saves the world not by power, but by love and truth” walks the path of the “Servant of the Lord,” spreading God’s justice and light without extinguishing the fragile hope of the weak and the small. We, too, are invited to walk this same path.

[A word from the author] I felt once again that the Bible is like a living book of prophecy even today.

● Second Reading: Acts 10:34-38

This passage records a sermon preached by Peter in the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion and a Gentile. God commanded Cornelius through a vision to “send for Peter” (Acts 10:5-6), and through this encounter Peter comes to realize that “God shows no partiality.” God’s salvation is not limited by whether one is Jewish or Gentile, or by whether one observes the Law.

To “fear God” means to honor Him, to desire to obey Him, and to live with God as one’s standard. To “do what is right” means to live sincerely before God. Such people are accepted by Him. Peter proclaims that Jesus is “Lord of all,” the Lord of all humanity, both Jews and Gentiles alike.

Among the many aspects of the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus, the message that announces reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sins, liberation from fear, the coming of the Kingdom of God, and peace with God (shalom) is described as “the word that proclaims peace.” Jesus’ Gospel, His healings, miracles, and preaching are described as “events that took place throughout the land,” and they are historical realities.

Jesus was anointed through the work of the Holy Trinity. Specifically, when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, and the Son, Jesus, was publicly revealed as the Messiah?the Anointed One. Because the Triune God was with Jesus, He went about doing good, freeing people from the power of the devil, and performing many miracles.

[A word from the author] “God accepts those who are united with Jesus and seek to walk by following Him.” This is the very heart of the Gospel. While there is a tendency to emphasize human perfection with messages such as “Become a saint” or “Bemore righte ous and pure,” the truth that God also accepts imperfect people brings relief and peace. It loosens the tension in our relationship with the Lord, relaxes our shoulders, and allows us to cherish the conviction that “it is all right to keep walking just as we are.”

● Gospel Reading: Matthew 3:13-17

John the Baptist proclaimed repentance for the forgiveness of sins and, as the one who prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah, administered baptism as a sign of repentance (Isaiah 40:3). Into this scene appears Jesus, who is without sin.

Jesus' baptism is the fulfillment of prophecy and expresses His decision to stand in the same position as humanity (Isaiah 53), sharing fully in human life. Although John knew Jesus to be the greater one (Matthew 3:11), he had not yet grasped the full scope of how the prophecy would be fulfilled, and therefore tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized.

By referring to Himself and John as "we," Jesus indicates that He is the one who has taken upon Himself God's plan of salvation (Ephesians 3:3), while John is the prophet sent by God. It is "fitting" that each fulfills his respective role. In the Old Testament, prophets anointed kings with oil; in the New Testament, however, heaven (God) opens toward Jesus (the Son), and God's Spirit descends upon Him. This scene is the anointing of Jesus by the Triune God, publicly revealing Him as the Messiah (Savior) and marking the starting point of His public ministry.

God declares, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Psalm 2:7; Isaiah 42:1), bearing witness that Jesus is the one who is pleasing to God's heart and is indeed the Savior.

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