

The Baptism of the Lord Year C

Luke 3:15-16,21-22

15 A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, 16 so John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.'

21 Now when all the people had been baptised and while Jesus after his own baptism was at prayer, heaven opened 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily shape, like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you.'

Other readings: Isaiah 42:1-4,6-7 Psalm 28 (29) Acts 10:34-38

The final feast of the Christmas season is the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Having celebrated his birth and his manifestation as the Messiah for all nations, it is appropriate to conclude the season with the event which begins his public ministry.

Our gospel reading contains two verses about the work of John the Baptist. John was a major figure during Advent, for it was he who prepared the way for the coming of Christ. Now we see him as the one who offered baptism to Christ in the Jordan. John clarifies that he himself is not the Christ. He knew he was a servant, one who would point the way to someone 'more powerful'. John was a strong and effective preacher of forgiveness and new life. Jesus will show his power above all by his mighty works of healing. John alludes to the Spirit who will accompany the work of Jesus and to his new kind of baptism.

The evangelist Luke presents the baptism of Jesus in a unique way. Jesus, who is in no need of conversion himself, shows solidarity with all those coming to John for baptism. Luke hardly mentions the baptism itself but concentrates on the manifestation of the Spirit and on the voice heard. As so often in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is presented as praying after his baptism. It is as if he is at prayer as he awaits the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Most remarkable is Luke's description of the Spirit 'in bodily form', whereby the evangelist insists on the reality of the Spirit's presence. The vision is seen by all, and the voice similarly to be heard by all. The words are inspired by the Servant Song which is our first reading from the Book of Isaiah: 'Here is my servant, in whom my soul delights.'

Why did Jesus seek baptism from John?

How similar is John's baptism to that of Jesus?

Let us seek a renewal of the grace of our own baptism.

Let us prepare to accompany Jesus in Luke's story of his ministry throughout the coming weeks.