

- Gospel accounts of Jesus' baptism tell us that people from all over Israel and beyond were coming to be baptized by John. But why?
- After all, John is telling them that they're living a lie...foolish ... ignoring the inevitable judgment to come, and the eternal existence which awaits—whether it be Heaven or Hell, depending upon whether they live in accord with God's will.
- He accuses them of self-absorption and being seduced by the world—not exactly complimentary.
- After all...what's his favorite word? “Repent!”...which simply means: “Stop what you're doing, re-evaluate you lives, and turn to what is good!”
- “Repent” is, by the way, is a favorite theme of Jesus as well. And that's why the prophet says of John: “*A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!*”
- Why the desert? Because in the desert we shed the extraneous, and we focus on what is needful. This is what both Jesus and John are calling us to: to seek that which is essential.
- That which does not lead us to the good and to God leads away from Him...and to our own condemnation for infidelity.
- Sounds harsh...but it is, nonetheless, true.
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- What drives John to chastise them? Love. Love of his fellow man—and, more urgently, love of God; it is the same reason a priest or deacon, a bishop or pope warns and chastises.
- John did. Jesus did. St. Paul certainly did. All the great saints and preachers of the world have done so.
- Why? We tend to dress it up in soft language in our day, but the reality is: as John says, there is only Heaven or Hell; you are given whichever you choose by the actions of your life.
- God wants all to be saved, as St. Paul notes, and He gives us the Way to do it: Jesus Christ.

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- And what great arduous thing must we do? Simply to love God and neighbor—which is all the law and the prophets. And the commandments of God...the teaching of Christ...is simply expansions on those two great commandments.

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- John is a picture of courage: fearless in pursuit of truth, willing to endure whatever hardship may come in defense of that truth, even unto death...that he may be faithful to his Lord.
 - John knew—and preached—what St. Paul would later write...well aware of the primary weaknesses of Man: “...*the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other...*” (Gal 5:17 RSV) ... *To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.*” (Rom 8:6 RSV)
 - This is why Jesus and His saints emphasize humility, temperance, a spirit of poverty (“*Blessed are the poor in spirit*”), and chastity—whether by fidelity of husband and wife to one another in marriage, or in the single life.
 - St. Teresa of Avila in a vision saw souls in mortal sin “*falling into Hell like snowflakes*”...so always seek the holiness of being in a state of grace...without mortal (and, as much as you can, without venial) sin.
 - Remember, O Christian: YOU are part of the Body of Christ...a temple of the Holy Spirit...the tabernacle of the Eucharist...the anointed of God, in baptism and confirmation. Do we think that we can violate His temple...His tabernacle...His very Body and Blood...with impunity?
 - In the OT, the first king of Israel—Saul—pursued David out of jealousy to kill him. And when David had a chance to kill Saul first, he refused, saying: “*The LORD forbid that I should put forth my hand against the LORDS anointed...*” (1Sa 26:11 RSV)

- ...and yet, when we transgress this great covenant of love God has made with us through the sacraments, are we not raising our hand against the Lord's anointed? Against ourselves, and others?
 - Remember the privilege given you to be of the people of God—through baptism, through confirmation, through the reception of God's own Body and Blood...something for which people of Israel never dared to even dream.
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- Everything Jesus does works towards the accomplishment of His mission, which is Man's salvation.
 - He gives Himself on the cross to fill the void of justice caused by sin, because He is God and therefore infinite...and only the infinite ocean can fill the infinite void of injustice done towards God by sin.
 - Why does He do this? One reason: because of God's love for you.
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 - Jesus comes to be baptized to accept this mission that the Father has given him...not to be purified BY the waters, but rather blessing the waters of the world in preparation for the sacramental baptism to come through His death and resurrection.
 - And at His baptism...from Heavens opened descends the Holy Spirit like a dove, and thunders the voice of the Father: "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased*"...heard again at the Transfiguration...but with the added command to the disciples: "*Listen to Him!*"—these only two public manifestations of the persons of the Trinity together in the history of the world—the voice of the Father, the Son baptized, and the Holy Spirit as the dove.
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- So today, recall your own baptismal mission: to bring others to Christ through word and example, with the courage of both Jesus and John the Baptist—to follow God's moral law, to love our

neighbor in charity and forgiveness, and to proclaim the truth of the Gospel.

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- Jesus was the representative of all sinners of the world; as St. Paul writes, God the Father, "*...made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" (see 2 Cor. 5: 21. Rom. 8: 3).
- Jesus knows that our lives are difficult, for Scriptures says: "*...we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*" (Hebrews 4:15)
- ...but it also says: "*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need,*" (Heb 4:15-16 RSV)...and St. Paul assures us: "*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength...*" (1Cor 10:13 RSV)
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- So today, remember your own baptism, and the purity of your newly-washed soul...when the Father whispered once again to you as well: "*You, too, are my beloved child. On you, too, my favor rests.*"

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Reading I

[Is 40:1-5, 9-11](#)

Comfort, give comfort to my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her
that her service is at an end,
her guilt is expiated;
indeed, she has received from the hand of the LORD
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!

Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!

Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill shall be made low;
the rugged land shall be made a plain,
the rough country, a broad valley. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together;
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Go up on to a high mountain,
Zion, herald of glad tidings;
cry out at the top of your voice,
Jerusalem, herald of good news!

Fear not to cry out

and say to the cities of Judah:

Here is your God!

Here comes with power
the Lord GOD,

who rules by a strong arm;
here is his reward with him,
his recompense before him.

Like a shepherd he feeds his flock;

in his arms he gathers the lambs,

carrying them in his bosom,

and leading the ewes with care.

Responsorial Psalm [PS 104:1B-2, 3-4, 24-25, 27-28, 29-30](#)

R. (1) **O bless the Lord, my soul.**

O LORD, my God, you are great indeed!
you are clothed with majesty and glory,
robed in light as with a cloak.

You have spread out the heavens like a tent-cloth;

R. **O bless the Lord, my soul.**

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You have constructed your palace upon the waters.

You make the clouds your chariot;

you travel on the wings of the wind.

You make the winds your messengers,
and flaming fire your ministers.

R. O bless the Lord, my soul.

How manifold are your works, O LORD!

In wisdom you have wrought them all—

the earth is full of your creatures;

the sea also, great and wide,

in which are schools without number

of living things both small and great.

R. O bless the Lord, my soul.

They look to you to give them food in due time.

When you give it to them, they gather it;

when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

R. O bless the Lord, my soul.

If you take away their breath, they perish and return to the dust.

When you send forth your spirit, they are created,

and you renew the face of the earth.

R. O bless the Lord, my soul.

Reading II [Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7](#)

Beloved:

The grace of God has appeared, saving all

and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires

and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age,

as we await the blessed hope,

the appearance of the glory of our great God

and savior Jesus Christ,

who gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness

and to cleanse for himself a people as his own,

eager to do what is good.

When the kindness and generous love

of God our savior appeared,

not because of any righteous deeds we had done

but because of his mercy,

He saved us through the bath of rebirth

and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

whom he richly poured out on us

through Jesus Christ our savior,

so that we might be justified by his grace

and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

Baptism of the Lord

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Gospel [Lk 3:15-16, 21-22](#)

The people were filled with expectation,
and all were asking in their hearts
whether John might be the Christ.
John answered them all, saying,
“I am baptizing you with water,
but one mightier than I is coming.
I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals.
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

After all the people had been baptized
and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying,
heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him
in bodily form like a dove.

And a voice came from heaven,
“You are my beloved Son;
with you I am well pleased.”