

- 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 not exactly sweet and tactful. He is telling them that they're living a lie...foolish ...unmindful of the inevitable judgment to come, and either the eternal reward—or sentence—which awaits—all dependent upon whether they live in accord with God's will.
- He accuses them of self-absorption, infidelity to God and being seduced by the world—not exactly complimentary.
- What's his favorite word? "Repent!"...which simply means: "Stop what you're doing! Re-evaluate your lives. Reject that which God rejects; 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 discard the extraneous, the distracting, and necessarily focus on the essential. This is that to which both Jesus and John call us: to seek that which is essential.
- ...because that which does not lead us TO the good and to God leads away from Him...possibly forever if we don't heed their call to conversion.

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- Why is Jesus—the sinless God—baptized? St. Maximus of Turin writes: "*Christ is baptized, not to be made holy by the water, but to make the water holy, and by his cleansing to purify the waters which He touched...For when the Savior is washed all water for our baptism...is purified at its source for the dispensing of baptismal grace...that Christians will follow after Him with confidence...The column of fire went before the sons of Israel through the Red Sea so they could follow on their brave journey; the column [of fire] went first through the waters to prepare a path for those who followed...so now, in the column of His body, he goes through baptism before the Christian people...[and]*

strengthens the footsteps of faith in the bath of baptism.” (Lit of Hours, Vol. 1, p. 612)

- God wants all to be saved, as St. Paul assures us, and He gives us the Way: Jesus Christ.
 - And what great arduous thing must we do? Simply to love God and neighbor—which is all the law and the prophets—by following the absolute Good—the will of God as given in His Word in scripture...the teaching of Christ...as explicated by His Church...for Jesus tells the apostles, the first leaders of the Church: *“What you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven.”*
 - And thus, when we dismiss the doctrinal teaching of the Church, we dismiss Christ’s word as well.
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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.
 - In our Christian lives and through baptism, this is the grace given us; we need only exercise the courage to adhere to it.
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 - So remember, O Christian: YOU are part of the Body of Christ...a temple of the Holy Spirit...tabernacle of the Eucharist...anointed of God, in baptism and confirmation...imbued and fortified with the same grace even as the martyrs of old...as the martyrs even of today—in the Middle East, in China, and around the world.
 - Always 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 imagine.
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- At Jesus’ baptism, the Heavens and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove, the voice of the Father thundering: *“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!”

- In obedience to the Father, then, let us always listen to Him...and as scripture exhorts us: *“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,”* (Hebrews 4:15-16)...strengthened by St. Paul always by his words: *“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...”* (1Corinthians 10:13)

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- As this is my last Sunday with you, I’ll adhere to the time-honored...and much beloved...university tradition of the last lecture being a briefer one.
 - But, as we bid farewell...I encourage you: remember your own baptism and the attendant privilege given you...the purity of your newly-washed soul in that moment...a purity of soul we should ever seek to renew...when the Father whispered to you then, as He does whenever we repent and do His will: *“You, too, are my beloved child. On you, too, my favor rests.”*

Baptism of the Lord

2019

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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.

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

2019

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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.”