

Baptism of Jesus – Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

The people wonder whether John the Baptist was the Christ. He denied it and assured them that a stronger one than he was coming, who would baptize with the **Holy Spirit** and with **fire**.

Then the people meet **Jesus** for the first time. He is among those who have come for baptism and is at prayer after his own baptism. The Jesus of Luke is a model of prayer for future Christians. Of fire, there is no sign, but instead Jesus sees the Holy Spirit in the shape of a **dove**, the bird that brought the olive leaf to Noah after the flood to signify a new era between God and his creation. At the same time, *Jesus hears his mission from the **mouth of God himself***. God did not speak to Jesus by means of an angel as he had spoken to Zechariah or Mary. Jesus heard words traditionally addressed to Israelite kings at their coronation. As God's Son, Jesus was the true successor of David.

As the one in whom God was well-pleased, he was the Servant foreseen by Isaiah. Like that servant, he would be among his disciples as one who serves and for them, his blood would be poured out. The Baptism of Jesus by the Jordan was to be supplemented by a *second baptism of suffering and death*. It is then that fire would be poured out on the earth and for this baptism he longed. The baptism and mission of the Christian can not be understood in terms of the Jordan to the neglect of **Calvary**. We are not told when the apostles were baptized but when they received the Spirit at Pentecost, they saw it in the form of **tongues of fire**.

At the close of this Christmas Season with the Baptism of Jesus, we have the Epiphany or Manifestation of Jesus, Son of God again through the voice of God. We have no indication whether anyone else also heard the voice of God besides Jesus, but a Manifestation is not for Jesus alone. The important part of Jesus' Baptism is that the manifestation of Jesus as God's Son, is that again it is tied to Jesus' eventual suffering and death. All four gospels point to Jesus' Passion and death. One Scripture scholar pointed out that the main message of the gospels are the suffering and death of Jesus, and all the rest is just an introduction.

I have always found Scott Peck's book *The Road Less Traveled* as helpful in understanding Jesus' life and our life as followers of Jesus Christ. In the very first sentence Scott makes the simple statement that "Life is difficult." In his book, in short, is a description of the attributes that make for a fulfilled human being, based largely on his experiences as a psychiatrist and a person.

In the second part of his book, he addresses the ***nature of love***, which he considers the driving force behind *spiritual growth* and contrasts his own views on the nature of love against a number of common misconceptions about love, including that love is identified with *romantic love*, and that love is related to *dependency*, or that true love is linked with the feeling of *'falling in love.'*

However, Peck and others argue that ***true love*** is rather an **action** that one undertakes consciously in order to extend one's ego boundaries by including others or humanity and is therefore the spiritual nurturing—which can be directed toward oneself, as well as towards one's beloved.

His perspective on love is that it is not a feeling, it is an activity and an investment, that is, "The will to extend oneself for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's ***spiritual growth***." As Christians, we know this but at a deeper level. Other writers mention the different kinds of love that the Greeks have names for. Unfortunately, in English we have only one word with many adjectives to clarify which kind.

Through Christ we have one who shows us the most important love, and that is Agape. This love is most clearly shown in the gospel passage that takes place on the shore right after Jesus' resurrection. He is roasting fish. After eating, Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" But the Greek word that Jesus uses is ***agape***. Peter answers all three times, using the Greek word for love, ***philia***. The third time Jesus asks Peter "Do you love me," he uses *philia*. The difference between the two words is that *agape* has the understanding that one loves to the point of giving one's life for the beloved.

Jesus asks us, "Do you love me with a love that you are willing to die for?" Now this love doesn't have to mean a death that may end in ***martyrdom***. It can. The age of the martyrs ended in the early 4th century, even though some today still die for their faith. But a new movement started in the early Church that was called a ***white martyrdom***, where the individual offered their life to the Lord through what would eventually become the Evangelical Vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience.

As a reminder, our baptism in Christ Jesus calls us to those same vows even if we are married! Live simply—Poverty, Obedient to the Gospel message, and live Chastely with eyes not wandering around but focused on Christ. Our baptism in Christ calls us each day to live these Evangelical Vows in *agape* love, a love willing to die to ourselves so that Christ may live in us. That is what we are baptized into, Christ Jesus, and the faith community that he founded!