

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
The Baptism of our Lord
St Mark – January 9, 2022
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Jesus is the Son of God

Much of our gospel reading today overlaps our reading from the third Sunday in Advent.

On that Sunday in Advent we read the verses right up to the point of Jesus being baptized. We heard John's exhortation, his passionate explanation that it is Jesus, not he, that is the Messiah.

When we read only the verses that were read back in Advent it is easy to come away believing that Luke is focusing on John in this story, but today we read the verses that give a fuller understanding of what is happening here. This story begins with John addressing his listeners. Luke begins the story with:

“John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers!”

The crowd listens and asks questions, questions that make it clear that they are sincere in their desire to understand and act upon his message. He gives them specific examples of their sins and tells them how they should behave instead.

On both Sundays, that third Sunday in Advent and this morning, we read about the crowd's confusion regarding the identity of the Messiah. They are wondering if John is the long awaited Lord. John leaves no question when he tells them that:

"I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals."

The verses that follow make it clear that Jesus was in the crowd! Jesus was in the crowd that heard John refer to them all as a brood of vipers. That brood of sinners listened to John, recognized their sins, repented, and were baptized.

When all those baptisms were complete Jesus stepped forward and walked toward John and the recently baptized crowd looked on.

Our reading today ends with the voice from heaven claiming Jesus as his son and if that doesn't send chills down your spine, you are not paying attention.

Jesus stepped into the Jordan river and walked to where his kinsman, John (looking as wild as ever) was waiting for him. I imagine that neither of them said a word. They both knew and felt the majesty of the moment they were about to share.

The servant who proclaimed Emmanuel, the servant who was constantly whispered about as many mistakenly thought him to be the long awaited Messiah, this faithful and committed servant was about to baptize Jesus.

John knew the true identity of Jesus. He had recognized Jesus as the Messiah before either of them were born.

When John lifted Jesus from the Jordan and the baptism was complete Jesus was praying. Heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove.

I've seen representations of this scene in paintings and in movies. A white, glowing-with-bright-light dove descends from heaven and hovers above Jesus. As those well know words,

“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

are said.

But reading what is actually written here, it is the Holy Spirit in bodily form that descends like a dove. Not in the form of a dove.

When I try to imagine that, a book that was made into a movie comes to mind. The Shack is not a great literary work by any means and some object strongly to a point of theology it presents, but I'm a sucker for books and movies that help me flesh out the Bible.

The Shack tells the story of a man who is hurt badly and has turned his back on God, but it's not the story that I'm reminded of here, it is the way the Three-In-One is represented in the movie and specifically the way the Holy Spirit is depicted. A woman plays the part of the Holy Spirit and she's difficult for me to describe.

The best I can do is to say that I see her as wispy, gentle, loving, caring, and comforting. She seems to be a little flaky at first, but she is not. There is definitely a confident strength about her.

As I envision the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus in bodily form, I see a being more like a person than a dove, more like the movie's representation of the Holy Spirit in bodily form. Then I hear a voice of strength, compassion, and love coming from someone unseen.

I hear a voice that is like no other voice I've ever heard before. It's almost like I feel the voice and even though I am also hearing the voice, it is feeling the voice that consumes me.

The voice clearly proclaims, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

For that recently baptized crowd, as for us today, there can be no doubt. The many signs of Jesus' identity are now sealed. Jesus is the Son of God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.