

# Connecting with the Sunday Readings

**The Baptism of the Lord**

**Gospel Word**

Matthew 3:13–17

The Gospel according to Matthew begins describing the public life of Jesus with his baptism by John. We believe that Jesus was sinless and that he was always good. So why did Jesus travel to the Jordan River where John was baptizing for the sake of repentance? Why did Jesus have to repent? This was probably Matthew's way of telling his listeners that Jesus was unquestionably willing to do God's will.

It is very clear to us that there was a voice from heaven affirming that Jesus was his beloved Son and that the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove. It is not clear in the translation however, whether or not the people who were there could hear the heavenly voice and see the Spirit of God descending, or if only Jesus was aware of it. Some commentators feel that if John had heard the voice, he would not have expressed his doubt later in Chapter 11. And if the crowds had seen the Spirit or heard God's voice, they wouldn't have thought Jesus was simply a prophet (Matthew 16:13-14). Once again, Matthew gives a message to his community: this beloved servant is God's own Son. The message is also given for us, the baptized members of Christ's Body, so that we may hear, and then proclaim God's message.

*-by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute*

## Living the Word

Most of us take our own Baptisms for granted, which is too bad for us and for the Kingdom. For some people, Baptism is almost considered admission to heaven, if they keep the rules. There is no realization that Baptism is for our whole life in this world. But think about this, in Baptism we are immersed in water and called immediately a new creation and a beloved child of God. We are anointed with the same Spirit and offered the same power of love that enabled Jesus to do good, and heal those who were sick or oppressed by religious and cultural biases. Many people hear and see our Baptisms. Are we aware of the power that we have been given? Do we claim it? Have we become actively engaged in the power of God's love in our daily activities? Ideally, we are a people called and chosen to go about our lives doing good and healing people who were sick or oppressed by religious and cultural biases. It is in the concrete actions and stories of our lives that others hear and see the God who loves them far better than they can imagine. When you think about your plans for the upcoming week, can you envision times, events, and people who are in need of the power of your Baptism?

## One-line Prayer

God the Holy Spirit, we thank you for loving us. We ask for the courage to claim our baptismal power for others. Amen.

# Connecting With the Sunday Readings

## Baptism of the Lord

Matthew's Gospel begins the public life of Jesus with his baptism by John. We believe that Jesus was sinless and that he was always good. So why did Jesus travel to the Jordan River where John was baptizing for the sake of repentance? Why did Jesus have to repent? He didn't do anything wrong. To answer this, we have to read the whole story.

Jesus went into the water. Water is needed for life. But water can also kill. The story of Noah is about the lethal side of water. As the story goes, all the people on earth with the exception of Noah and his family were terrible. So terrible, that God decided to get rid of them. The point of the Noah story worth recalling is the role of the dove. Noah sent out a dove to see if land had appeared above the water. That was necessary for life to continue. The first dove sent didn't come back. No land yet, was Noah's judgment. A second dove was sent and returned with an olive branch. A good sign, Noah concluded. Some land was available but the dove came back because there was insufficient land to support life. A third dove was sent and never returned to the ark. That's the sign we needed, Noah said. The dove could live on the land. Therefore, so could Noah and his brood. Life could continue.

## A Gospel Word for the Home

### Matthew 3:13-17

During Jesus' Baptism a dove appears as the words of God come thundering from heaven saying that he is loved! He is the beloved one. His task will be to tell the rest of us the same message. God loves us too. God loves us first; that is before we love God.

Ideally, we learn this right from the start of our lives when we are loved into life by parents and other caregivers. Of course, because we forget, or tend to doubt certain things after a while, we need to hear again and again that we are loved. Pope John Paul II often talked and wrote about how important to God the love life of the family was. He called the Christian family "a community of love." What he meant by that was that the family received God's love and the family passed God's love on to others, from generation to generation.

Sadly, today, family is often the first community to feel the negative pressures of society that are anti-love and anti-life. There is often a tug-of-war between seeking only what's best for the individual self and caring for others with empathy and love. Most likely, if you are reading this, you have sided with the forces of love. Unfortunately, the decision to live this way requires a re-commitment to love almost every new day. It's probable that Jesus heard the loving affirmation of his Father more than just on the banks of the Jordan River.

## Parent Survival

The primary task of parents is to love their children. That's simply said, but it's far from easy to accomplish. We do well to tell our children they are loved when they are infants, toddlers, youngsters and teens. And if you are like most parents, this is not always easy. No matter what our age, it's wonderful to know that we are loved.

The expressions of love are almost infinite. Sometimes we use words. Sometimes our words can appear hollow if not connected with loving actions. Sometimes love is communicated with a kind look and sometimes with a harsh look. Learning the many languages of love is part of the education needed by all. God created us because God loves us. We live most fully in God's creation when we love here as God loves.

## Car or Meal Talk

Bless your children by telling them at the least expected moments that you love them. Then, ask them what that means for them.

*-by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute*

## One-Line Prayer

God the Father, we thank you for loving us even at times when we are not very lovable. Amen.