

Homily For the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord - Year A

St. Peter's 5:00/5:00 Masses - January 11/12, 2019

Isaiah 42:1-7 "A bruised reed he will not break ... He will not grow faint or be crushed."

Psalms 20 "The Lord will bless his people with peace ... The voice of the Lord is powerful."

Acts 10:34-38 "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power."

Matt. 3:13-17 "He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him."

The Baptism of the Lord

Introduction

The stores have been done with Christmas for a couple of weeks, but hopefully you were able to hang onto it a little bit longer. If you haven't already, now you can take down your Christmas tree, unless you are determined to wait for a couple of months and removed it bit by bit as the needles die and fall on the floor. In the Church, we don't let Christmas go that easily. We have this one more big feast before we go into that period we call Ordinary Time, which is not ordinary at all. It's how we spend a lot of the year figuring out how God becoming human gives new meaning to our ordinary lives.

It was truly terrible news this week that an act of violence killed many in Iran, including Canadians, and even some in our own community. It is, once again, a time of trying to make sense out of things that just make absolutely no sense.

But in the middle of that was the strange announcement that Prince Harry of England, and his wife, Megan, deciding that they were not going to live their royal responsibilities any more. They just want to live an ordinary life. Good luck to them. Usually that story works the other way around. A prince or princess somehow mistakenly ends up in a humble peasant family and only finds out much later that they have royal blood, and then they save the kingdom.

That story really is a mere shadow of the event we celebrate today. Jesus' is not just any royal person. He is the king of the universe. And, he is born into the most

ordinary of all situations, in the most humble of situations. He is vulnerable. He is in constant danger. He has no special status in the world.

And yet, so far we have heard angels declare the birth of a saviour, the magi bring gifts for a king and priest, and John the Baptist call him the messiah. Now the heavens open and we hear God the Father's own voice thunder: "This is my beloved Son." So this story should have a happy ending. It does, but it's not like TV and movies. It's the story we call the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah

We have been through so many readings from the prophet Isaiah. For hundreds of years people would have been wondering, who is he speaking about? "Thus says the Lord: Here is my servant, my chosen. I have put my spirit upon him. He will bring forth justice. He will not cry or lift up his voice. A bruised reed he will not break and a dimly burning wick he will not quench. He will not grow faint or be crushed." So this figure will be so gentle that he will not hurt what has already been bruised, but he will eventually triumph himself.

Jesus' Baptism

Then we come to John baptizing people in the wilderness so that they would turn away from sin and back to God. Early Christians had trouble with this. First of all, it appears that Jesus is subordinate to John. Second, why would he have sought John's baptism of repentance. What need did he have to repent and turn back to God?

We have this great dialogue between the two cousins to give us the answer. Can you imagine John's distress. He knows there is something wrong with this picture. John: I can't baptize you. You have no sin to turn away from. Jesus: Let's do it anyway to fulfill all righteousness.

Fulfill: Jesus has come to fulfill. That means to keep a promise. Jesus came to keep God's covenant promises to Israel and to the whole world. This is God's saving plan. More than that, Jesus isn't just keeping God's promise. He IS that promise fulfilled. He is the answer to every hope, every dream, every human desire at the

deepest level. Isaiah says: I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out from the prison those who sit in darkness.

Righteousness: This means holy, as in proper moral conduct of the Christian disciple, being obedient to God's will. Peter says in today's Acts reading: Anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable.

Just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.

The heavens opened. An opening in the heavens signals a moment when human beings are in direct communication with the divine. The descent of the Spirit recalls the messianic prophecies of Isaiah: The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.

Peter later explains the effect this anointing will have: "Jesus is Lord of all. After the baptism, God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him."

Our Baptism

We have a lot of religious talk around Baptism, but the first thing we really need to know is that our baptism is meant to enter right into the middle of our real lives, not just some fancy talk.

By our Baptisms, we too are called God's beloved sons and daughters with whom he is well pleased. We might ask, is God not pleased with us unless we are baptized?

Well, today, Jesus puts that idea away. Was Jesus not special until he was baptized? Of course he was. Did he have to go to John to gain preferred status? Of course not. Jesus was already the only begotten Son of God, not just from his baptism, but from his birth, and not just from his birth but from his conception. Not only that, but his mother and human father were also loved by God before he

was born. Hopefully, we have learned that much from having gone through the Christmas season and remembered the events of the birth of Jesus, God entering into our world in a new and profound way. All of the early Church teaching tells us that, from the beginning, our world, our human life, was raised up in a new way that had never existed before.

It would be as if Harry and Megan decided to rent the house next door to us. Instantly, our neighbourhood would become a pretty special place in a way it wasn't before. Some people will hate them for it, but some will want to invite them to their next BBQ.

That's what has happened to the whole world now that Jesus has become one of us. By his baptism, he has been anointed by the Holy Spirit to bring Good News to everyone, not just the poor, but the poor in spirit, those who are humble enough to know they need him.

Call To Action

Jesus didn't need to be baptized, but he let it be so as a way of opening the path into the heart of the divine life of God. The water didn't make Jesus more holy or more righteous. By being baptized, HE made the WATER holy, so that all who would accept him and be baptized would share in his own divine life. And what is the sign of that life? The words of the Baptism rite: "You have been given a new birth of water and the spirit."

Because of what Jesus did, our baptism isn't just about repentance, as important as that is. It is now about us being anointed to bring good news to the poor and the oppressed and those bowed down by life and those too sad to lift themselves up, and those feeling beaten up by life, by other people and by anxiety and distress. Baptism calls us to BE that voice of God saying to people: Did you know that God loves you? Did you know that God has a plan for your life, not of woe and sorrow but of peace and joy.

Baptism is the sign that Jesus Christ gave the Church to offer to people who desire to receive the ultimate Good News: hearing the Father's voice say: You are my beloved Son. You are my beloved daughter."