

The Baptism of Jesus (Year C) – 12 January 2025

Being in love

In today's Gospel – Luke 3:15-16 & 21-22 – we have a remarkable revelation that can easily be lost amidst the drama portrayed. Luke has set the scene a few verses earlier: “The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, ‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God”’” (3:1-6). Something big is about to happen: “The people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah.” From the midst of this excitement a voice is heard: ““You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.””

This is a moment of great tenderness and intimacy. It is as if we glimpse in an instant the deepest reality of God. It tells us much about who Jesus is and why he is with us. It is not surprising therefore, when this same revelation is heard again at the transfiguration, with a command added: “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” (9:35).

When Jesus returns to Nazareth his announcement in the synagogue shows that he is aware of his mission to share that love of the Father with people everywhere: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (4:18).

This is what the Incarnation is about. This is where we may begin to grasp the meaning of *our* baptism – our being baptized into the one baptized by John (Romans 6:3). We are invited into this relationship of tenderness and intimacy through him, with him and in him. Christianity is truly about being in love – literally, *being* in love.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical on hope, reminds us of a very concrete and practical truth: “We cannot ... ‘merit’ Heaven through our works. Heaven is always more than we could merit, just as being loved is never something ‘merited’, but always a gift. However, even when we are fully aware that Heaven far exceeds what we can merit, it will always be true that our behaviour is not indifferent before God and therefore is not indifferent for the unfolding of history. We can open ourselves and the world and allow God to enter: we can open ourselves to truth, to love, to what is good” (Spe Salvi, #35).