

The Baptism of Jesus 2019

**And a voice came from heaven,
"You are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased"**

*Look about! See, I am doing something new!
Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*

Background to the Baptism of Jesus

Biblical scholar and author, John Pilch, provides some historical background to the story of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan: "One of the most certain historical facts recorded in the gospels is that John baptized Jesus. This was done during the dry season when the water of the Jordan River was at a comfortable temperature. In this honor-driven society, one must establish their value at every opportunity. In the baptism, God personally proclaims a relationship of patron and client with Jesus. Without this public declaration, Jesus would have been unable to initiate his ministry. Even so, Jesus' hometown neighbors remained skeptical: *'Is this not the carpenter's son? . . . Where did he get all of this?'*

"From earliest times, the followers of Jesus were embarrassed by his submission to John's baptism. It was a controversial question in the early church. For John, baptism was for the purpose of repentance; Jesus did not need to repent. Matthew's explanation: Jesus did this to please his Father.

"There was a fundamental difference between how John understood baptism and how Jesus did, which caused an eventual split between the two. For John, baptism was a necessary precondition for entering into the Kingdom of God. For Jesus, baptism was a feasting of already being in the Kingdom of God, as he said, *"The Kingdom of God is already within you."*

This is the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus

What happened to him is what happens to us. Our Christian baptism means being received into the same patron/client relationship that Jesus had with his Father. With the public declaration of our baptism, we are declaring that we too intend to initiate his ministry.

Participating in his ministry is witnessing to the value-system of Jesus, described as the Beatitudes. It's the poor in spirit, the sorrowing and lowly, those who thirst for justice and show mercy, the peacemakers who are the clients of Jesus' Father.

The opposite value-system is what Paul calls, "the world." This is an unfortunate choice of words inasmuch as the word, "world," has often been understood to mean that the world - the body - are sinful. On the contrary, they are beautiful; it has been pronounced so in the story of creation in Genesis as being "very good." It's the arrogant, the boastful, the self-absorbed part of ourselves that is not living according to the value-system of Jesus, that's not participating in his ministry, that is not yet being baptized.

† We will know we are participating in the ministry of Jesus, called the Beatitudes, when we refuse to turn the denied, repressed, or rejected parts of ourselves against ourselves and against others.

† We will know we are witnessing to the value-system of Jesus when we refuse to let any negative storyline or self-protecting agenda define who we are.

† We will know we are clients of Jesus' Father when we accept the imperfect moment for what it is and are able to say as Jesus did in the Garden of Olives, "Let it be."

Living our Baptism

If our personal, social, economic and political lives are characterized by attitudes opposite of Jesus - those of anger, exclusion and revenge - no matter how justified we may think we are in acting so - we may have been baptized, but we have not yet received the grace of Baptism. Baptism is about more than the ritual as know it today, it is about finding ourselves being received into a relationship with Jesus' Father and of being initiated into his ministry.

We can see historically how this was not always understood. Jesuit Fr. Francis Xavier, the co-patron of the missions, went about Goa during the sixteenth century baptizing thousands of the native peoples, but, as Jesuit Fr. Paul Coutino of Goa says, he forgot to convert them. After he left, they went back to their traditional worship. Xavier was operating out of his understanding of Baptism. He believed that those who were not baptized were going to hell, which is why he baptized people en masse.

Living out Baptism will be manifested by living our lives with a simplicity of spirit, a thirst for justice and the desire to forgive - both towards ourselves and towards each other. This is the Spirit of our Baptism crying out from the heaven:

"You are my beloved sons, my beloved daughters. With all of you, I am well pleased"

Look about! See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

The Feast of the Baptism of Jesus is our Feast

Happy Feast Everyone!