

BAPTISM OF THE LORD – A  
“Live as a Covenant People”  
(Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-38; Matthew 3:13-17)  
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A French Canadian logger went to confession one day claiming he had a sin for which there was no forgiveness. The priest responded that God was forgiveness and encouraged him to proceed. The logger recounted this story: “Fader, I worked with a non-believer named Sandy McPherson. One day Sandy fell off a log into the chilly water, and I grabbed him by the hairs and asked him if he believed in the Jesus and the Pope. When he answered “no”, I held him under the water for 30 seconds. Then I lifted him up a bit and asked him if he believed in Jesus and the Pope and the Blessed Virgin Mary. When he replied “no” again, I held him under the water for a full minute. Then I lifted him up and asked him for the third and last time if he believed in Jesus, the Pope, the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints. When he replied “yes”, then I drown him before he lose the faith.”

“Then Jesus came to John to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’”

Live your baptism fully as a Covenant People

To understand this feast of the Baptism of the Lord more deeply, we need some background knowledge. A clue comes from the first reading: “I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations.”

God’s desired relationship with his people is covenant, not contract. A contract around baptism would sound like this: “I give you my sins; you give me eternal life.” A contract would be an exchange of things.

A covenant is very different. A covenant around baptism would sound like this: “I give you myself; you give me yourself.” A covenant is all about relationship; actually, an intimate interrelationship.

Our salvation history of God working in our wounded humanity is literally a history of covenants. First God made a covenant with Adam and Eve – a couple. Later God made a covenant with Noah and his household – a family covenant. Next God made a covenant with Abraham and all his extended clan – a covenant with a tribe. Then came the powerful covenant with Moses that would make all the loosely knit desert tribes into a nation.

Finally, when the fullness of time had come, God made a new covenant with us through Jesus, his own Son. This would be a new and eternal covenant through water, blood and the Spirit. This covenant was initiated with the birth of Jesus, the Incarnation, and enacted in a public way at his baptism – the feast that we celebrate today.

This feast spells out for us the deeper meaning of this new covenant with God through Jesus. His baptism is a second Incarnation – a second opportunity to totally identify himself with us as Immanuel. He is one of us, taking on our sinful humanity to free us from the power of that sinfulness.

This feast of the Baptism of the Lord is also a second revelation or Epiphany. In striking fashion we see and hear the Trinity in action and learn that God is family, intimate relationship, loving unity. The Father speaks from the heavens and the Spirit alights on Jesus in the form of a dove.

It is Jesus who by living out his own baptism will bring about the new and eternal covenant with us that was the plan of God from the moment of the Fall of humanity in the garden of Eden. The other readings now contribute their own insights. This Lamb of God who is the peace and justice of God will show us a new way of life, a way of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of selfless service and unconditional love.

Baptism, “*baptizo*”, means immersion, like a sponge soaks up water. It means being like steel that is heated red hot and plunged into cold water so that all the molecules are frozen in the same direction. The steel is tempered, hardened, made stronger, in this way.

Our baptism does that for us. We are changed, transformed, made into a Covenant people. We are called to be a faithful and willing Covenant people, light to the nations. We are to care for one another in a tender, attentive, joyous way. We are to lead lives that are free from sin and addiction, lives that are characterized by the healing of our defects of character, because we baptized into a Covenant people.

A lady by the name of Margaret in the North West Territories grasped the meaning of her baptism. Whenever she is in a group and there are introductions, she introduces herself this way: “My name is Margaret, and I am baptized.” Would that our baptism would have the same impact upon us!

Mr. Lumsden, the uncle of my sister-in-law, lives his baptism by being a blessing to all who meet him through the gift of affirmation. As soon as he greets someone, he never fails to find some positive thing to say about that person, or others they both know. He is the most affirming person I have ever met. What a beautiful way to live out one’s baptism!

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is similar to the baptism of Jesus. God blesses us through the Spirit that hovers over the gifts of bread and wine, with the Body and Blood of his beloved Son that re-creates us and fashions us into a covenant people, the Kingdom of God, the Body of his Son.

So on this feast of the Baptism of the Lord, let us resolve to live fully our own baptism as a Covenant People, the Church, at the service of the world.