

The Baptism of Our Lord • First Sunday after the Epiphany (C) 2007
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Holy Eucharist, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, Setting 2
Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 29; Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

J. J.!

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who
was and Who is to come. ✠ Amen.

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah . . . Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

--Luke 3:15,21-22

In today's Gospel, Our Lord enters into the Jewish people's act of repentance. In the waters of the Jordan, over which they had crossed with Joshua to inherit God's promise of the Land of Israel, they now hear a new promise. The One Who is the fulfillment of that

promise is in the water with them. The people do not know this. They hear it preached by John, whom they do believe, but they do not know that the One John proclaims is there, among them, with them, for them.

One knows Who it is Who goes down into the water of repentance with Israel, and that One speaks. The One Who speaks from above the waters, from above the expectation of the people, from above the repentance of Israel and John's ministry of repentance, the One Who speaks from above the world and even from above and beyond the heavens, One Whose voice is mighty for those who believe it, who trust that voice, One Whose voice is so graceful, so pure in its descent it can only be compared to a dove, One Who identifies Himself forever as Father by

calling the One Who enters the waters with Israel 'my Son, the Beloved,' this One speaks. Who hears?

Jesus hears. We hear that voice in Jesus, but not as Jesus, the one solitary individual among many who sought John's baptism. We hear the father's voice only in Christ, only *in* Christ, as He invites us to become one with Him through the Baptism of water and the Holy Spirit with which He washes us. We hear the Father's voice only with His ears, only with His heart and mind as our hearts and minds are one in Him, in His Church, only as our ears are opened through His healing. Otherwise, the Father's voice from above the heavens and from beyond our world is only so much noise, or perhaps wishful thinking.

Our Lord hears this voice from heaven twice: here, at His baptism by John in the Jordan, and again on the Mount of Transfiguration, where we will hear it with Him at the end of this Epiphany season. This is the voice of a father every son craves, the voice of esteem, the voice of approval, the voice of a father who delights in his son. Our Lord hears this voice here, at the beginning of His ministry, and again at its midpoint where He will hear it in a mountaintop from which He must descend, either to glorify His Father by giving His life for sinners, or by turning His back on that voice. Why did Jesus, Whom His Heavenly Father affirmed to be the Messiah, the Anointed, the Christ, not hear His Father's voice at other times? Why was there no voice from above the heavens

during His forty-day temptation in the wilderness?
Why was there no voice from heaven as Jesus faced
those who resented His healing and forgiveness, those
who condemned Him as a drunkard and a sinner?
And where, oh where was the Father's voice the day
His Son cried out to heaven as He hung, exposed to
heaven and earth on the cross of His execution? Why
was the Father silent more often than not? Why did
the heavens not open in a more timely way?

I believe that the Gospel story is told so
that we will ask just this question, so that we can be
with Jesus in that silence and know that He is with us
in those ways and times when heaven seems closed to
us. I believe that we are also to consider this: The
Father Who speaks to Him, Who loves Him, Who

delights in Him, is a Father Who must speak across the great gulf that separates heaven and earth, God and humanity, because of sin. For this is a Father Who voluntarily *loses* His Son, for our sake, for the sake of those who are open rebellion against God, for the sake of those who will deliberately kill the Beloved Son of God the Father. This is a Father Who cannot win us back from our self-love in any other way than to lose, to sacrifice the very One He loves with the almighty love of God so that God, *in* our humanity, finally loves as we were created to love, free from self, open to others and to God. To achieve that, Father and Son accept a life in exile from one another until all is accomplished.

The Father speaks only twice, from across that great distance, but it is enough to bridge the gulf between heaven and earth, enough to bind the Son in His humanity to His Father's divine love. The Father speaks to you and to me in Holy Baptism, opening our ears to His voice through the Holy Spirit, and the Father speaks to us again, and again and again in Holy Communion, as Christ Himself gives Himself to us as both meal and host at the Holy Supper He instituted and commands us to share. There may be hunger and thirst of spirit and body, sorrow of soul and every manner of challenge to hope in between that washing and feeding we receive as members of Christ's expectant people, but it is enough to sustain us and

enough to enable us to see and hear by faith. ✠

Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ✠ Amen.



Gloria in Excelsis Deo!