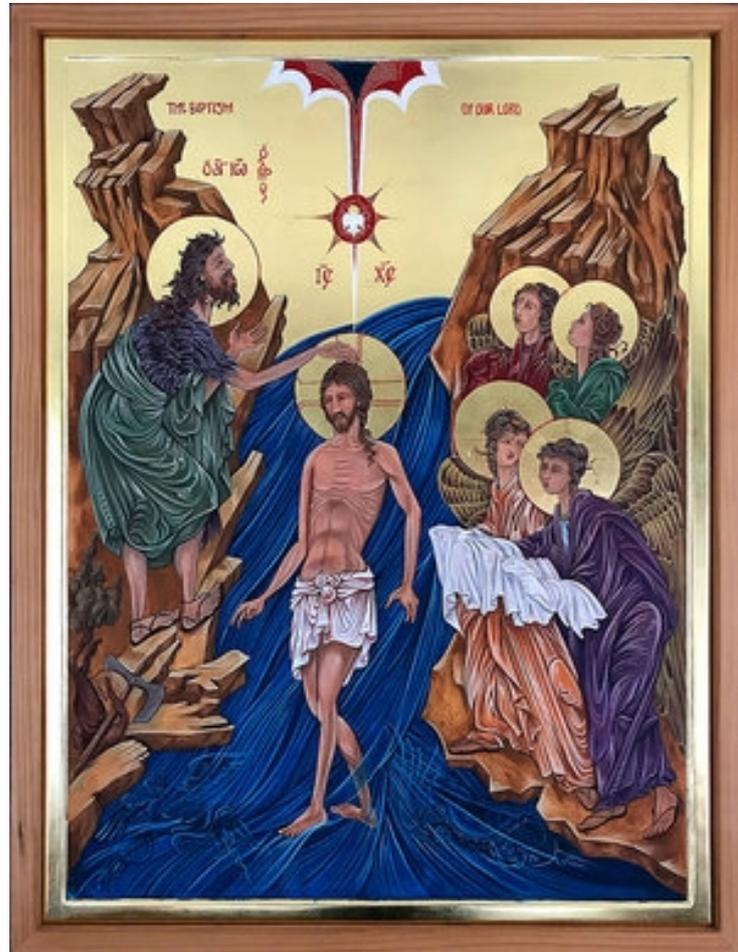


# Sunday Readings

## the Year of Luke



*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 : 22 )*

## Baptism of the LORD

Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2019

**notes**

1. The biblical excerpts are drawn from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), published by Oxford University Press (1994).

2. **Cover image:** The Baptism of the LORD icon written by the Studio of John the Baptist, Takapuna, NZ.

3. **Lectio Divina:** reading GOD's WORD in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us:

*"In the presence of GOD, during a recollected reading of the text, it is good to ask, for example: 'LORD, what does this text say to me? What is it about my life that you want to change by this text? What troubles me about this text? Why am I not interested in this?' Or perhaps: 'What do I find pleasant in this text? What is it about this Word that moves me? What attracts me? Why does it attract me?'"*<sup>1</sup>

The practise of *lectio divina* requires a quiet space, a passage of scripture and the willingness to give time to the project. The passage used should be short. For the purpose of this booklet, we suggest using the gospel reading of the up-coming Sunday.

There are four steps in the traditional practise of *lectio divina*. The steps don't have to have the following order:

*lectio (reading)* – read the passage of Scripture read slowly - more than once. If a particular word, phrase, or sentence seems significant (even if you don't know why) you may want to write it down.

*meditatio (reflection)* – let the significant words fill your mind without straining to analyse them. We are in GOD's presence and so let the Holy Spirit lead your understanding of the words.

*oratio (prayer)* – allow your heart to speak to GOD, in words inspired by the passage of Scripture, or by the thoughts that have come to you, while reflecting on it.

*contemplatio (rest)* – let go of ideas and words and allow yourself to rest in the presence of GOD, in simple and wordless contemplation.

This booklet gives the context and some commentary on each of the readings and the psalm used in the Sunday's liturgy. Familiarity with the texts and the commentary beforehand, can better prepare our hearing and understanding the passages in our worship. Whatever our preparation for doing this exercise and whatever questions we may use to break open the passage, we must be conscious of Christ's promise: *'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them'*.<sup>2</sup>

4. **Review of the Week** – at the end of each reflection the review examines one of the themes of the readings, usually drawn from the gospel, and provides an opportunity to check our own performance, in the light of the Word and Eucharist that we have previously heard and experienced.

1 From paragraph 153 The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium) – Pope Francis (2013)

2 Mt.18:20

## BAPTISM OF THE LORD

13<sup>th</sup> January 2019

### *Jesus is baptised by John*

#### **introduction**

Anyone seeking to be a disciple of Jesus has to answer the same question Jesus did: "Are you willing to take on your humanity with faith and love?" The possibilities of hope and life-giving eventually engage the world of despair. In the very early part of the gospel account, events move quickly towards describing the beginning of Jesus' practice and teaching. He is presented and trusted as, 'The One', whose person makes the difference by engaging the world of despair.

**first reading: Isaiah 42 : 1 – 4, 6 – 7** [ the Servant: a light to the Nations ]

*Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen,  
in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him;  
he will bring forth justice to the nations.(1)  
He will not cry or lift up his voice,  
or make it heard in the street;(2)  
a bruised reed he will not break,  
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;  
he will faithfully bring forth justice.(3)  
He will not grow faint or be crushed  
until he has established justice in the earth;  
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.(4) . . . ,  
I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,  
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;  
I have given you as a covenant to the people,  
a light to the nations,(6) to open the eyes that are blind,  
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,  
from the prison those who sit in darkness.(7)*

In the midst of exile, the prophet wants the listener to imagine a situation where 'bread' can be given to the hungry, outside the delivery-system of the dominant Babylonian empire. The Israelites felt abandoned in exile in Babylon. Not knowing or believing that a new beginning was possible, they gave way to despair. In this first of *the Servant Songs*, the prophet of the exile period, penetrates the numbness of this despair, by publicly voicing hope that, the LORD is resolved to do 'new things' (vv.6-7) and *the Servant* is going to be the agent to implement these new things (vv.1-4). *The Servant* is empowered by *the LORD's spirit*,<sup>3</sup> which blows newness into the world. The *spirit* of the LORD equips *the*

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3 In Hebrew = 'ruah' or 'wind'

*Servant* to do what humanity regards as impossible: "to bring justice" (v.1d).<sup>4</sup> *The Servant* does not proceed by force or high-handedness into the deeply conflicted and high-risk arena of bringing justice. The LORD's justice is brought about gently, carefully and caringly. *The Servant* respects 'bruised reeds' and 'dim wicks' (v.3) – persons who are weak, fragile and vulnerable. The way of bringing justice matches the goal of justice which *the Servant* enacts. The means serve the end – with *the Servant* respecting the weak, but powerfully in working for a new order (v.4).

The prophet presents the work of *the LORD's Servant* (vv.6-7). The purpose of *the Servant* is the purpose of the LORD. The LORD intends that society should be re-ordered against slavery, oppression and disability. GOD now asserts power to enact the transformation. The Creator intends that the creation should be rehabilitated to its full, fruitful function.<sup>5</sup> The poetry holds together the concrete actions for justice of the Servant and the LORD's transcendent *power-for-life*. What emerges when the spirit-filled Servant does the work of GOD is a just social order. The exiles were too bruised and blinded to imagine it. Now they are invited into a powerful hope in the light of the LORD's purpose. Such hope can shape the future in concrete ways because the GOD of hope intends life in the midst of the history of hopelessness and death.

**response: Psalm 29(28) : 1 – 4, 9 – 11**

[ The Voice of GOD in a great storm ]

*Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.(1)  
Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;  
worship the LORD in holy splendour.(2)  
The voice of the LORD is over the waters;  
the GOD of glory thunders, the LORD, over mighty waters.(3)  
The voice of the LORD is powerful;  
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.(4) . . .  
The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl,  
and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all say, "Glory!"(9)  
The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;  
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.(10)  
May the LORD give strength to his people!  
May the LORD bless his people with peace!(11)*

The speaker announces the "glory of GOD". The *One* who is revealed has power over the turbulence of Nature – whose very voice is a transcendent

4 'To bring justice' - to make available an equitable, trusting, life-giving social order.

5 The poetry of *Isaiah* permits hope rather than optimism and amazement rather than despair to those whose world had collapsed.

revelation. GOD's glory differs from that associated with human rulers. This emerges clearly in the closing lines of the psalm. From this Ruler, the people may seek their own empowering and their own peace. The psalm is a hymn that describes the threat to the created world, by chaotic disorder of a cosmic scale. It begins with a call to worship (vv.1-2) addressed to the, "*sons of GOD*", or as the translation has it, "*heavenly beings*". The imagery is that of a meeting of the heavenly court of '*the gods*' and their '*messengers*'.<sup>6</sup> The speaker applies global, even cosmic, metaphors, to a liturgical scene among the '*gods*', offered to us as spectators. '*The gods*' are called to honour, glorify and assign sovereignty to the LORD, the true GOD.

The phrase, "*countless waters*" (v.3) suggests that the images are more than historical, perhaps referring to the global waters of chaos in *Genesis*.<sup>7</sup> The speaker describes a terrible threat against created order, but affirms that the LORD is powerfully at work to subdue the storm and overcome the disorder. The voice of GOD moves decisively and forcefully to undo the old order and tames the forces of chaos. The LORD is more powerful than any of the forces that resist GOD – the LORD is so powerful that mighty trees are twisted and stripped (v.9).

The other '*gods*' observe this power in action and on this evidence they render their verdict and salute the glory of the LORD (vv.9b-10) – doing what they were originally summoned to do by the speaker's opening call. The cry of recognition functions like the formula of praise at the end of the LORD's Prayer – it leads to enthronement. The waters of chaos are no longer a threat because the real Ruler has tamed the chaos. The new Ruler's throne is established above the flood. When the chaos is overwhelmed and driven from the field, blessings are appropriately given from the newly established throne by the newly recognised Ruler (v.11).

It is a promise that is opposite of the chaos that seemed to be more powerful. The declaration is decisive and world-changing, like the word *shalom* in the blessing in the *Book of Numbers*.<sup>8</sup> The movement from '*glory*' (vv.1-2,10) to '*shalom*' (v.11) is similar to the angel's song at Bethlehem.<sup>9</sup> The establishment of the new ruler brings with it new well-being to the world. The speaker sings into place the new order that overcomes chaos and the very act of speaking the new song is itself practising that new order.

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6 The hymn is probably of ancient Canaanite origin that the Israelites took over. The language reflects Canaanite mythology and rhetoric.

7 *Gn.1:2*

8 *Nm.6:22-26*

9 *Lk.1:14*

**second reading: Acts 10 : 34 – 38**

[ Gentiles hear the Good News ]

*Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that GOD shows no partiality,(34) but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.(35) You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ – he is LORD of all.(36) That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced:(37) how 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.(38)*

The account in *Acts* of the baptism of Cornelius, reminds us that John's baptism of Jesus, carries with it the promise of "*baptism in the Spirit*". In the baptism of Cornelius ( the first Gentile convert ) that promise finds fulfillment and bursts through the boundaries to include, "*all those who fear GOD*".

Peter responds to Cornelius' household. The quality which the non-Israelite, Cornelius, had displayed in his prayer and alms-giving, was justice. Justice is a disposition which inclines a person to give to everyone her due with a view to the common good of the whole society. Earlier Peter had a vision that revolutionised his view of what was clean and unclean (cf.Ac.10:9-16). Now Peter affirms his belief that GOD accepts all who *do justice* (vv.34-35) and summarises the practice of Jesus.

Jesus brought a message of peace to the Israelites (v.36). He began in Galilee after John had announced baptism (v.37). Jesus did not act on his own, or out of his own strength, but was GOD's agent, anointed with GOD's *power* or *grace* to do good (v.38). He assaulted '*the power of the devil*', rather than performed, '*errands of mercy*'. When Peter is invited into a non-Israelite household, he goes as a witness to this practise of Jesus. He re-states that '*the good news*' was intended for the Israelites (v.36), but in light of this '*re-vision*', Peter baptises all present. While he is still speaking, events occur that confirm actions which show, '*that everyone who acts with integrity is acceptable to GOD.*' *The holy Spirit of GOD* came on Cornelius and his household (v.44). Peter is reduced to being a passive witness of GOD's intention, that non-Israelites can and do become part of the Christian community.

**gospel reading: Luke 3 : 15 – 16, 21 – 22**

[ the baptism of Jesus ]

*As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, (15) John answered all of them by saying, "I baptise you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to*

*untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.(16)*

After his baptism in the river Jordan by John, Jesus receives the anointing of *the holy Spirit* to consecrate him to announce to the poor, "*the good news of their salvation*". Luke tells of the start of the transition, from hope to engaging the world of despair. John performs an ancient ritual that symbolises conversion and repentance. He speaks of another figure whose baptising will transform his own water-baptism. The new history will begin with *the One who is to come*.

Baptism is a Greek word that meant '*bath*'. It was a purification ritual that many people on Earth had practised. The '*conversion*' or *repentance*, required by John's baptising, was a change of attitude. This new attitude is preliminary to the arrival of the one expected by Zechariah, Elizabeth, John, Simeon, Anna and Mary. The presence of the One to come, will be marked by the power of the Spirit of GOD, which like fire will both inspire and divide (vv.15-16).

*Now when all the people were baptised, and when Jesus also had been baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened,(21) 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."(22)*

It seems that this baptism of Jesus was the beginning of consciousness of his mission as Messiah and of being possessed by *the Spirit of GOD*, or *the Spirit of Liberation*. In the Scriptures it had been prophesied that a *the holy Spirit of GOD* would descend upon *the Messiah*. That's what Luke said came down upon Jesus in the form of a dove (vv.21-22). Once, when the religious leaders asked Jesus who had given him authority, he told them he wouldn't answer them if first they didn't tell him with whose authority John had baptised. In saying this, he was telling them that he had received his authority, or mission as Messiah, in that baptism of John. At other times Jesus also spoke of his death as, '*a baptism*' or '*bath*', that he was going to undergo. He meant that his true baptism would be that of his death – his blood-bath – this is what he accepted when he accepted his calling as the Messiah.

***items for sharing:***

- *Without a vision people perish – in time of exile the dream of homecoming kept the Israelites strong. Comment on **Isaiah 40 : 1 – 5, 9 – 11***
- *The good life is possible through the faithful reception of GOD's gift. That giftedness is summed up in the power that Jesus brings. Would-be disciples must be open to receive it. Comment on **Titus 2 : 11 – 14 & 3 : 4 – 7***

- *Luke's account of Jesus' baptism emphasises the decisive part played in his life by the act of GOD initiating his history. Our task is to respond in faith and obedience to the mighty acts of GOD that culminated in the coming of Jesus Christ. We are not into defending a human religious cause. Comment on **Luke 3: 15 – 16, 21 – 22***

**prayer:**

*Open the heavens, almighty Father,  
and pour out your Spirit  
upon your people gathered in prayer.  
Renew the power of our baptismal cleansing  
and fill us with zeal for good deeds.  
Let us hear your voice once again,  
that we may recognise in your beloved Son  
our hope of inheriting eternal life.  
Grant this through Jesus Christ,  
your WORD made flesh,  
who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
in the splendour of eternal light,  
GOD for ever and ever. Amen*

**review of the week:**

*The Baptism of the LORD brings to a close the Christmas season and recalls the opening of Jesus' public mission and ministry. The voice from the cloud acknowledging Christ as the beloved Son of GOD, ushers the Christian community (the Church) into Ordinary Time, and its weekly proclamation of the life and teaching of the LORD. The grace revealed through the prophets, the Baptist, and at the moment of the beginning of Jesus' practice, underline an openness to the new things that are offered through the practise of a wide-ranging faith, hope and love.*

*Our temptation is to reject newness because it poses threats to our settled ways, or requires too much effort to adapt. As we begin our year we are challenged to recall our own baptism, when we too were made daughters and sons of GOD, filled with the holy Spirit, and commissioned to bring both GOD's favour and GOD's fire into our world. Our baptism means our engaging the world of despair. It means rejecting the temptation to a accept business-as-usual. The practice of Jesus gives us our programme for the time ahead.*

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