

**Homily for January 12, 2003  
Baptism of the Lord**

**By Father Charles Bowes**

**Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7  
Acts 10:34-38  
Mark 1:7-11**

## *We discover our own baptism in the baptism of Jesus.*

On the surface, this story of Jesus' baptism in Mark chapter 1 appears to be about Jesus. But really it's about you and me.

It's about our discovery of what our baptism means. That's the way this story was understood by the early Church – as the early community's understanding of it's own baptismal experience. We, like those first believers, discover that God adopts us in the Spirit in a manner no less real than God proclaims Jesus to be His own Son. The revelation is that those who meet Jesus meet no less than God, and that we in turn are God's voice of hope and comfort to the world we touch.

Does it seem strange that this story about the baptism of Jesus tells us little about the baptism itself? We are given much more detail about what takes place immediately surrounding that event. Saint Mark's gospel concentrates on John as the forerunner of Jesus and on the manifestation of God's presence. He undoubtedly was aware of the connection that readers would make with the event on Mount Sinai, which was marked by the sky opening and a voice speaking. This is surely a sign that God has something to say – whenever there is a big event, the sky opens.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus' ministry is marked by urgency. He moves from one event to another, one location to another. Hardly pausing for breath, he acts "immediately," according to the story. This rush of ministry seems to be impelled by God's Spirit. When Jesus comes out of the water, the heavens open "immediately," the Spirit descends, and a voice speaks. That same Spirit "immediately" drives Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted and ministered to.

No wonder the community of believers places the story of Jesus' baptism on this day, the last of the Christmas season. The Spirit drives us too into the arena of our lives, the time of our testing and our bearing witness. As with Jesus, it is time for us to recognize the urgency of the public Christian ministry.

Through Christ Jesus we meet no less than God. Whatever happens for Christ Jesus happens for us. The sky opens for each of us today, though more subtly. God has something to say, calling us to look up, listen, and follow. It is easy to get swept away in the tide of business. To be sure, we must do urgently what is urgent. But we are called to read the signs of the times and hear God's call. Isaiah's message, our first reading in chapter 42, is addressed to us who are under the same open heavens as is Christ Jesus: "I have called you for the victory of justice. I have

grasped you by the hand. I formed you and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations.”

Can we witness to the divine presence in the world? Are we called to the ministry of unity among the community of believers? Can we show the faithfulness of God’s love? Do we do the urgent work of the good news? Do we allow the Spirit’s urging to affect how we live the life of Christ, the life refracted in great variety in the yearly remembrance of the saints?

The sky opens over you and me, and a voice cries out, “I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have called you, and you are mine.” We, who are together the church, are called to live the baptism we have received. We might well approach God through Jesus, asking, “Lord, how did you handle the choice God made of you as His very own?”

Much of our baptismal life boils down to what the British essayist G. K. Chesterton wrote: “The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people.”

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