

The Baptism of Our Lord: January 8, 2023
“Baptism is the Beginning of Beautiful Vocation”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Of all the things we know of John the Baptist, he was called to baptize Jesus. That was his main purpose and duty in life. The other baptisms, the fiery sermons, the strange clothing and prophetic life were all subservient to and even the consequences of this great duty. It was in his vocation to anoint the Anointed One.

As you reflect upon John, it is not difficult to see something of John’s fear, something of the curse of Eve that was upon him. As John lived as a son of Eve, the curse in desiring to be lord, rather than one who serves and is subservient to another, pulled John. The same is true for all the sons of Eve.

We all chafe under authority. It is the inheritance of sin, the ancient discontent that has cursed our race and marks us as fallen men. It drives us from the gifts of God to seek pleasure in evil and honor among liars. In short, this is covetousness. It is no coincidence that there are two commandments which seek to safeguard this gift of all gifts; namely, contentment, or satisfaction.

Long before the Rolling Stones made it famous, John, in not so many words cried out, “I can’t get no satisfaction.” When John comes to the culmination not only of his career but of time itself, he hesitates. “I need to be baptized by you.” He says to Jesus. It is as though he said, “This isn’t quite right. I am only a man. How can I do such a thing? How can I, with my dirty thoughts, my secret laziness, my pride, how can I anoint the Anointed One? Isaiah fell on his face and was afraid in the Temple. You have said no man can see the face of God and live. Yet, am I to place my hands on God and put Him in His place? Am I to mark the Lamb for slaughter, to ordain Him as the priestly victim when I know full well there will be no angel to stop the knife? This is too much for a mere man. He should just do it Himself.”

“Let it be so now,” says the Lord. **“For thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”** And by that Word from the Word made flesh, John was given the strength to do what needed to be done. Jesus was plunged into the flowing sewage of our sins.

He was counted guilty among the sinner. He was stricken by God and driven from there into the wilderness to face the adversary with our sins strapped to His back. Mark uses language of Jesus being cast out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Jesus was without angelic defenders, without food or water; He was the New Adam.

The full force of God's own just wrath will come upon Him and Barabbas the murderer would go free. In all of this, and more, thus is all righteousness fulfilled. Thus does God keep His Word and promise. He spares sinners. He saves the world by forsaking His own Son. God gives John a part of this. He says "it is fitting for US to fulfill all righteousness."

In many ways, it is easy to sympathize with John. For we are also the sons and daughters of Eve. We know what it is to chafe under our duties. We don't want to do the hard work of parenting, of changing diapers and saying "no," of enforcing order and discipline. We want to be popular with our children. We want to be friends with them, and wish they would learn to be a man or a woman from someone else. It takes too much time to talk to them. It is easier to buy them off, to give them candy or games, to amuse them enough to leave us alone. It is more fun to talk to our friends or watch tv or amuse ourselves.

The same goes for husbands and wives. We just don't want to do the work. If we want our children to be our friends, to entertain us and make us feel good about ourselves, we want our spouses to be our admirers and lovers, but we do not want to serve. We do not want to wash the dishes, rub the feet, listen to the stories about them, or whatever else it is that is needed of us. Contrary to popular belief, it is not merely the rich and powerful who use husbands and wives as trophies.

Whatever vocations God has given to us, it behooves us to recall that vocations are not defined by privilege, but by duty. Selfishly speaking, no one can know John's hesitation better than those who have been called into the Office of the Holy Ministry. The man who serves in this office without fear is the man who serves without faith. For to handle the holy things of God, not merely His Body and His Blood which so terrified our forefathers in the middle ages, but to dare to handle, to proclaim, to teach His Word, is to risk one's very soul.

The temptations are great, and great men of great character and learning have fallen prey to seductions of every kind. Those who aspire to such an office must beware, be on guard. Take care of your wife and family. Teach the Truth as though your life depended upon its purity, for it does. Such fear can easily paralyze mortal men. The only antidote is the Word of God. ***“Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”***

This is where an important teaching about vocation is needed. John did not make Jesus the Messiah. He was simply the instrument by which God in the Flesh was anointed for His work. Anyone could have done what John did. It wasn't an esoteric or technical art, it didn't require a lot training or experience, but God called John for it, to it, in order to fulfill all righteousness. It was John's purpose.

We'll probably never know why Jesus didn't just do it Himself. What we do know is that God gives us a share in His kingdom. It was fitting for Jesus and John to fulfill all righteousness. It is fitting for you, too, to cooperate with God in good works, in your vocations. God calls us to His kingdom, to rule alongside of Him, and He uses you for good in an evil world.

Children are a good example of this. The children that are born to us are not ours. They are His. He is their true Father. They are entrusted to us, and through us God provides for them. He could have given them to anyone, but He gave them to us. We are the perfect match, the exactly right mother for that child, and that child for us. We would be fools if we did not feel inadequate for the task, but God provides. He says “Let it be so now. I know what I am doing.”

We can say the same of husbands and wives, of governments and citizens, of congregations and pastors. These vocations are all defined by duty. But fulfillment of them brings great joy and contentment. For nothing satisfies like being the person God has called you to be. It is what Paul spoke of when he said he had learned to be content.

It is what the Stoics skated around and got so close to. It is wise enough to have become bad poetry in the form of cliches: “Bloom where you are planted.” or “Let go and let God.” Those sayings, though trite, are wise and true.

What God gives is the opposite of that ancient discontentment passed on by Mother Eve. And what mother amongst us has not felt true contentment as her child read aloud or she watched her child help a younger sibling? What father did not feel at peace with all the world simply because he let go of the bike and the child rode down the road on his own? These duties are too great for us. We are inadequate. But God has called us to them. God will bless us in them, and in them God gives our greatest and best joys.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, of all the vocations, all the things to which God has called you, the first is Baptism. Before you are anything else you are Baptized. You belong to God. His Name is upon you. He has taken you to the Jordan river and joined you to Himself. He has buried you in His death and raised you to life in His resurrection. You have been anointed.

You will bear a cross, but you have also been cleansed. This vocation is also defined by duty. But as with all godly vocations, like being a mother or a husband or a pastor, its validity is not determined by obedience or faithfulness, but by the call. John was not worthy in himself to baptize Jesus. But Jesus fulfilled John's righteousness. He made it full. Where John was lacking, Jesus provided. Where John was failing, Jesus forgave. He declared John worthy, fully righteous, and then gave him a good work to do.

That is how you live in your vocations, even in Baptism. God provides what you need. He fills your righteousness. You are baptized. That is a historical, indisputable reality. You belong to God and He is well-pleased with you. He will speak in His Word. He will show you the way. He will make you content. If not only in this life, for sure in the life to come. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of the Church
The Baptism of Our Lord
8 January 2023

Heavenly Father, Your Son fulfilled all righteousness and submitted to Baptism with sinners in the Jordan. Well-pleased, You opened the heavens for us and anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. As You have joined us to Christ's death and resurrection by Holy Baptism and given us Your Spirit, strengthen our hearts and open our ears to hear Your Holy Word and rejoice that You have made us Your beloved children in Him. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, as You have opened heaven to Your Church through Holy Baptism, give her faithful teachers to proclaim Your Son, Jesus Christ, and all that accords with godliness, that many would repent of their sins and join Him in His kingdom. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We give You thanks for the gift of family. Bless all parents, especially mothers, that they would joyfully acknowledge Your gifts of spouse, children and home. Be near to the elderly, the widowed and the orphaned. Show forth Your grace to them, that they would not feel alone. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, Your Son, Jesus, is the Christ and the true King of this world. Grant great humility to the rulers of the nations, [*especially Joseph our president and Kim our governor,*] that they would submit to the preaching of His Holy Word for the sake of their own souls and for the good of Your holy people. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, have compassion on Your creation. Deliver from danger all who are threatened by natural disaster, dangerous weather, pestilence, flood or famine. Provide all that is needed for this body and life. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Marrina*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit she may faithfully keep the covenant into which she have been called, boldly confess her Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Darlo* celebrate his birthday. Grant that he may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of his life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, You sent Your Son as the Servant who would preserve the bruised reed and the faintly burning wick. Hear us on behalf of those in need of healing and deliverance [*including Marvin, Ruth, Zoey, Greg, Sandy, David, Pastor Jerry Doelinger, Jill, Pastor Small, Debbie and those we name in our hearts.*] Provide healing, restoration and justice according to Your good and gracious will, and grant that we would always rejoice in Your Son's everlasting faithfulness toward us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, in Baptism we were buried with Christ into death and raised with Him to walk in newness of life. As we partake of Holy Communion today, give us repentant hearts to receive Jesus' body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, You have called Your Church from every tribe and nation. Grant that Your people throughout the world would rejoice in the death and resurrection of Christ and live as those who have died and risen with Him in Holy Baptism; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**