

Reflection

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Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

January 9, 2023

Readings

Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6-7

Matthew 3:13-17

It is probably true that there is almost no one at this Liturgy of the Word (in the chapel or in their rooms or on Livestream) who remembers their baptism. Perhaps one or two persons were baptized as teens or adults.

There are family photos of course—I have seen mine, with my godmother holding me and my godfather next to her.

This seminal event of our Christian lives is lost to personal memory but not to life since we attempt to live our baptism each day.

We might name the Baptism of the Lord as Jesus' Vocation Day, the event that set him on course for his preaching and healing ministry, and ultimately to the Cross and Resurrection.

In past eras "vocation" was the code word for a call to religious life or the priesthood. Priests and Sisters would tell young people the "signs" of a vocation and what to do if they found one or two. It was a term for a very specific life choice.

The readings today speak both about what Jesus the Servant did to live out his vocation and the baptismal event with John the Baptist, his cousin.

Isaiah describes a servant, a light for the nations, someone who will open the eyes of the blind, free captives from prison and release those who sit in darkness. That prophecy would have given great hope to the Jewish people who longed for a deliverer from their oppressors. This servant would fulfil all their hopes.

Matthew's account of Jesus's baptism is quite simple: two people, water, John protests that these roles should be reversed—and then—amazingly a voice that confirms who Jesus is: "This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Did this happen? Did John baptize Jesus? Scholars agree that this is a historical account. Jesus came to the Jordan River, stood in line with others waiting to be baptized and then John baptized him.

The text confirms his identity. But what we can never know is what Jesus experienced. Deep within himself did he feel a confirmation of his vocation? We can

trust that something happened within him that set him confidently on the path of itinerant preacher and healer.

He gradually developed a sense of his identity and mission. Luke 4:18 is clear about this: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor, liberty to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind....to bring good news to the poor”, to let the oppressed go free.”

He went about doing good: healing the blind, the paralysed, the deaf, the woman with the haemorrhage, raising the little girl and his friend Lazarus from the dead.

He was brave; as his opponents plotted against him, Jesus courageously continued his mission. When arrested he did not resist; even as he experienced extreme pain on the cross, he thought of others first, such as his mother and the criminal next to him.

His vocation unfolded day by day after his baptism by John. We too have a vocation story of many years, from the first perhaps tentative “maybe I could be an IHM” to final vows and then all our years of ministry in the spirit of Jesus.

On this feast let us reflect for a few moments on how and where our Baptism has taken us. As this hymn tells us “We have come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord, trusting in His holy word, he’s never failed us—yet.”