

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 1:7-11

"A Special Inauguration"

I believe that today's Holy Gospel helps us to better understand what took place in the River Jordan when Jesus steps up to be baptized by John the Baptist. All four of the Gospels have accounts of this absolutely amazing event. Here we see the Savior of the world submitting Himself to be cleansed and baptized – receiving a spiritual acknowledgment and if you will inauguration by both God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

If you remember during Advent, we read about Jesus' Mother Mary visiting her older cousin Elizabeth near Jerusalem? Elizabeth was pregnant with John, who leapt in his mother's womb at the presence of the unborn Jesus in Mary's womb. John's father Zechariah is a priest of the Temple in Jerusalem, *"Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John."* (Luke 1:8-13) It was when the Angel Gabriel visited Zechariah, that Zechariah questioned the words that he had been told – and so he was caused to become silent until the Lord lifted that silence when John was named during his circumcision.

It is especially important for us to understand that Zechariah in his role as a priest of the Temple gets to lay the sins of the Jewish world upon the scape goat on the Day of Atonement – Yom Kippur – and then sends that goat out into the wilderness until its death. I believe that God was doing something very much more than just a baptism during the Baptism of Jesus. John the Baptist – in the Levitical line of priests – lay hands on the Messiah – as He takes on the sins of the whole world – and is then sent out into the world – into the wilderness. I think God made this a day of atonement for the whole world. Jesus gave His endorsement to John the Baptist's ministry and God the Father gives His endorsement as well, with His words during the baptism. It was John who said about Jesus, *"Behold the Lamb of God- who takes away the sins of the world."*

This absolutely, wonderful event appears in all four Gospels - in Mark 1: 1-11, Matthew 3:13-17, Luke 3:1-22, and John 1:31-34. This event is so important that it marks the beginning of Jesus's earthly ministry – as Jesus would proceed from the Jordan – across from Jericho and go out into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights – where He would be tempted by Satan.

You may be asking the question- why Jesus was baptized? Well, first, Jesus would fulfill all righteousness, being consecrated to God the Father, and then being approved by Him. All of God's righteousness requirements for the Messiah were fulfilled by Jesus. Second, this was the public announcement by John the Baptist of the arrival of the Messiah, the long awaited Messiah, that he had been preaching about. And then, Jesus' baptism allowed Him to fully

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identify with mankind's sinfulness and failure, even though Jesus had no sin Himself. And so, He carried our sins, not as a sinner, but He became our substitute – like the “scape goat.”

But there is so much more happening during the baptism, and we are given an indication of the presence of the Holy Trinity – present right before mankind for the very first time. Jesus is baptized and as He arises from the Jordan, the voice of God the Father is heard saying “*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*” I would venture to say that most sons are grateful to hear their father say – “son I am proud of you?” At the same time the heavens opened and the “*Spirit descending on him like a dove.*” What an amazing spectacle – there in the Jordan River was a view of God's amazing power.

"As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove." "And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."" (Mark 1:10-11) At this place across from Jericho in the Jordan River, John saw “*heaven being torn open,*” something only God Himself could do to draw attention to what was about to happen. All four gospels describe the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus, as a dove from heaven to fall upon and fill Jesus, both God and Man, and give Him strength to go into His earthly ministry – carrying the sins of mankind and giving Him strength to carry out the mission for which He became man in the first place. The humanity of Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit so that He would be able to face Satan – head on - in the wilderness and resist the temptations that the devil was going to throw at Him. After that, Jesus would return to the place of His growing up, Nazareth, and He would then proclaim in the synagogue (from a scroll of Isaiah 61) “*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*” (Luke 4:18-19) These words had been foretold by the Prophet Isaiah 600 years before Jesus was born –in Isaiah 61 – and were being fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

The Baptism of Jesus was just the beginning of three years in which Jesus would show the world God's love for His people in Word and deed – ultimately coming to the greatest demonstration of His love for us by willingly climbing that mountain and lying on the cross – to be nailed and lifted – humiliated – and forgiving His murderers before He breathed His last breath.

That day in the Jordan God the Father spoke in the presence of the Son and the Holy Spirit – revealing that Jesus is the only Son of God: “*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*” (Mark 1:11) Similar words were again spoken by God the Father, recorded in Luke 9:35 and Matthew 17:5 when Jesus appeared on a mountain in the Galilee, (the Transfiguration). In coming weeks, we will, actually it is February 14th, when we will have that Gospel and celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration. Moses and Elijah, Moses being a symbol of the Law, and Elijah a symbol of the Prophets, standing on either side of the “glowing Jesus” – revealing His true glorious nature “*While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them,*

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and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

God has never tried to hide His Messiah from His people; He has spoken about Him from the very beginning of time and even more pointedly told the world who He is at the baptism in the Jordan and at the Transfiguration. God wants the world to accept Jesus and believe in Him so that the entire world can be saved.

In the Gospel of John, a gentleman, who was a leader of the Temple, came to visit Jesus at night – for fear of being discovered by the other Jewish leaders, named Nicodemus. He asked Jesus about being “born again” and Jesus told him quite plainly, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16) As Jesus said, those who accept and believe in Him will be saved. Remember, Jesus received all of the sins of mankind that day in the Jordan from the son of a priest – and He would go on to carry them to the cross – defeating sin and death once and for all, so that we can in essence be washed free from our sins – like the waters of the Jordan on our souls.