

The Baptism of our Lord (January 8, 2012)

*“And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’”*

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

It is said that the human body is made up of up to 90% water. Our bodies are strung together by bones and sinews, blood and veins, and all sorts of other things in between. Our bodies are composed of much physical matter, and yet these physical elements alone do not constitute human life.

Let us begin at the beginning. In the story of the beginnings of creation there is a dark formless void. The waters, the stuff of life for us today, first existed lifelessly and without meaning. And then, all of a sudden, “a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” God speaks, God acts, and life emerges. Order

and intention are formed out of nothingness. What was once shapeless begins to take shape: what was not now *is*.

In the same way that God breathes His Spirit over the waters of creation, described in this morning’s translation as a “wind,” so He does with the creation of humankind when He breathes into the nostrils of the first man, infusing life into what would have otherwise been lifeless matter. The physical being is now alive. These parts that make up the body, that hold together and hold us together, now live. Water which constitutes much of the human body now has purpose, and that water participates in the living of human life. This is all God’s doing, for He has willed it.

And now there enters into the history of humanity another mode of existence; another kind of being; another kind of living. There is first the physical, of course, but now there is also the spiritual. Meaning and purpose are again given to water—the very stuff of life—and now in a new way. Jesus enters into the waters of Jordon and is immersed in it—not for His sake, but for ours. He does not need baptism, but we do. It was the Holy Spirit Himself who conceived our Lord in the womb of the Virgin Mary His Mother: He is true God from true God, and it is the Holy Spirit Himself, who is fully alive and present in the person of Jesus, who blesses the waters of baptism to cleanse our souls. Jesus, by His action, has now transformed the meaning of baptism. Before Jesus, there could only be a baptism

of water—a symbolic cleansing based on human intention. Now, with Jesus, there is a baptism of the Holy Spirit; a baptism of God’s own intervention, action, and transformation—a path cleared by the Lord within us for a different kind of life, for the present and for time to come. A new life of possibility has now been laid out before us; a new mode of existence prepared for us to walk in. God speaks, God acts, and life emerges. This is all God’s doing, for He has willed it.

The disciples Paul comes across had been part of the Forerunner’s following. The baptism of John was one piece of the puzzle, yet it remained at the human level. Jesus now brings a cleansing of the Holy Spirit—He washes us with the breath and wind of God to animate us—to give life to us—to reach into the very

depths of our souls. This is clearly manifested in the new level of being witnessed in the newly baptized—those disciples who are now baptized in the name of Jesus—by their speaking in tongues and prophesying. They are inwardly moved by way of spiritual gifts in a way they could not have been moved before, as previous to now they had not possessed this blessing and awakening of the soul. There is a new law at work within them—one not limited by the physical realm, but God’s immaterial and spiritual law of love.

When we are baptized, water is one thing—the Holy Spirit is another. We believe there is a real and actual change in the soul of each person baptized, something beyond the sensory perceptions—beyond the limits of thought and feeling, for instance, but not

necessarily excluding those things. Not every baptized person will manifest the Spirit in the same way as those twelve persons described in today’s Epistle, but all of us will be prompted by the Spirit to represent and manifest the inward movement of God’s inner-working. In other words, we are to be changed and that change is to be seen and known. God-with-us necessarily changes lives, and we are evidence of that continuing change. God, the Creator of the Universe, wills to continue to create and renew within us. The property of the Unchanging God for us is, ironically, change.

The identity of Jesus as God’s Son is confirmed by God’s action at the moment of Jesus’ baptism. The Father speaks, the Spirit moves, the Son is revealed. This is He who comes to bring new life to the world, so

that we may not merely live, but have life abundantly. Above and beyond the limitations of the physical and into the realm of the Spirit: this is the plane of existence to which we are all called. We are not merely meant to be physical bodies of water existing meaninglessly and pointlessly, as if our life had no meaning. We are meant to be spiritually infused, living with purpose and intention—to know and live the love of the God who creates us and our world to live in simply because He wills it. God is in the business of life, and He calls us to be a new creation even now.

What new things does the Lord desire to have born within you? What must die in order to make room for life? Turn yourself to the Spirit and tune yourself

into the Spirit, and see where the Spirit leads, hear what He has to say, and perceive what He wishes to do.

And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Do you hear it? Co-heirs with Christ, we are sons and daughters of the same Father, and our Father speaks to us. Let us indeed live in the freedom of our Kingdom.

*Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour, power, glory, might, majesty and dominion, both now and for evermore.*