



Bringing Home the Word



The Baptism of the Lord

January 11, 2015

Acting on the Spirit's Call

By Janel Esker

You never get a second chance to make a first impression.

Though today's feast day celebrates Jesus' baptism, in today's Gospel the Holy Spirit is the one making the first impression. As Jesus emerges from his baptism, the Holy Spirit descends on him in the form of a dove—a gentle bird normally associated with peace. That's certainly one first impression of the Holy Spirit.

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 42:1–4, 6–7

Isaiah proclaims the Lord's servant shall bring justice in silence, patience, and gentleness. Similarly, we are called to use our heritage and formation to bring others to salvation.

Acts 10:34–38

Peter identifies Christ as chosen by God to bring peace to the world, beginning with his baptism in the Jordan and spreading through healing and the word.

Mark 1:7–11

When John the Baptist baptizes Jesus, the Holy Spirit descends "like a dove," and a voice from heaven names Jesus as God's "beloved Son."

However, as we know from Jesus' ministry, the Holy Spirit's work in him was hardly quiet and peaceful. Jesus spent his life turning the status quo upside down—challenging those in power and uplifting those who were oppressed. Jesus called for repentance from sin, healed the outcast, and overturned the moneychangers' tables in the Temple.

As we learn in the reading from Acts, after his baptism Jesus was filled with "the holy Spirit and power." Talk about a second chance to make a first impression—this Holy Spirit turned out to be no meek dove, but a mover and a shaker!

Though Jesus' baptism was different from ours, we also receive the power of the Holy Spirit in our baptism and in the sacrament of confirmation. And the Holy Spirit seeks to move and shake in *our* lives, just as it did in Jesus' life.

But we're not marionettes controlled by the Spirit. We must respond to the Spirit's urging. In the moments when a colleague tells a racist joke, when we see a stranger treated unjustly, or when a lonely neighbor aches for companionship—in those moments, the Holy Spirit calls us to speak out in justice and to reach out in love. The Spirit continually seeks to make new first impressions in the world through *our* actions—if we are willing to respond. †

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What is your favorite name or image for the Holy Spirit?
- How does your baptism bring you peace? How does it bring peace to others?



Jesus, you remind us that we are God's beloved children. Increase our awareness of this great love so we may share it and recognize it in others.

Just Live It: Forming Faith

By Kathleen M. Basi

From the day the priest poured water over our babies' heads and anointed them with chrism, my husband and I knew it was our responsibility to train them in the practice of the faith. The rite of baptism told us so. But it didn't seem like a big deal. What's faith formation to infants? As long as we cuddle them and keep them fed, dry, and safe, we're mirroring God, who is love.

Fast-forward a few years, and the responsibility gets a lot scarier. After all, we're not theologians or saints. We're doctors and factory workers, stay-at-home moms, and retail clerks. What do we know about passing on the faith? What if we get it wrong—and our children leave the Church for good?

We faithfully send our kids to Catholic schools and religious-education classes, trusting that great Someone Else to cover our bases. Classes are important, but a living faith is learned by consistent example, and our children watch us all the time. Even after they're in school, we're still their primary teachers of the faith—and we can't teach what we don't know. In other words, forming our children's faith begins with forming our own. After all, faith lived does its own teaching to the next generation. †



Morality Matters: Only Fools Rush In

By Fr. Stephen Rehrauer, CSsR

A common cause of wrong moral choices is haste. True deliberation requires taking the time and energy to weigh all the facts about both efficacy and moral uprightness. In the rush to solve our problems, we usually want the fastest, easiest, and most efficient solution possible. It is amazing how easily we can betray our principles and put our moral beliefs on hold in these moments.

Stem cell research is a perfect example. Catholic teaching holds that human life and personhood begin at the moment of conception. Human embryos are human persons. Any production of stem cells that involves destroying human embryos is morally repugnant; in essence, it is an act of murder. Yet there was such an outcry, even among some

Catholics, when years ago the federal government restricted public funding of research involving the production of new embryonic stem cell lines.

The Catholic Church was criticized as being uncaring—more concerned about ideas than about living, suffering human beings. Appeals were made to stories of those suffering terribly who might be helped if the research would only be allowed to continue. The criticism was lodged that a needless delay occurred that was cruel for people whose time was running out. We were falling behind scientifically in this new and promising medical technology.

Today, many scientists working in public universities admit that because of that governmental restriction, they were motivated to research the use of other morally acceptable forms of adult stem cells. The result is that we know more about how stem cells work and their real possibilities for health care than we would have if embryonic stem cells had become the central and main focus of research.

In his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI points out that the failure to solve real issues often stems from falling into the mistaken belief that our most important problems are technical, when in fact they are spiritual and moral in origin. Moral deliberation requires looking beyond the first possible means that come to mind and asking not only what can be done but also what else can and should be done. Taking the time to do the right thing usually pays off more in the long run than rushing in like fools where angels fear to tread. †

WEEKDAY READINGS January 12–17

Mon. Hebrews 1:1–6 / Mark 1:14–20
Tue. St. Hilary: Hebrews 2:5–12 /
Mark 1:21–28
Wed. Hebrews 2:14–18 / Mark 1:29–39

Thu. Hebrews 3:7–14 / Mark 1:40–45
Fri. Hebrews 4:1–5, 11 / Mark 2:1–12
Sat. St. Anthony: Hebrews 4:12–16 /
Mark 2:13–17