

The Baptism of Our Lord (2018)

Mark 1:4–11 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, **"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."**

In the Name of Jesus.

What did He do? How was He pleasing to the voice from the sky?

While all the people from the only place in the world where you could WISH to find people attached to the

Living God, Who gave us our conscience, ‘ALL’ the people of that country and their capital went into the water and elocuted their agreement with verdict of the Law, of Moses, of Elijah, of John: “Any attachment of which I boast toward the sky or the earth beneath is SELF-SERVING!”

In short, “I agree with the Law that I am a sinner.”

And our Lord jumped into the Jordan too; and pleased heaven—TORE the heavens opened, and took away Heaven’s breath, the Holy Spirit!

Today’s lessons embolden your poor pastor, the man who knows these Three least—The Voice, The Beloved, The Dove—I have all the freedom needed to say to your old Adam and mine the two most offensive, unbearable messages:

1. The Law is NOT impressed with your repentance, or mine, or anyone’s;
2. The Gospel pledges not to be impressed either with your repentance, or mine, or anyone’s!

THAT message rips open the heaven, the GOD no man can grasp, know! Jesus Christ made the Holy Spirit jealous, it seems—He wanted to play at the incarnation too! But only One will do; so He came as The Dove!

And now you and I, and all the world—not one land, not one capital, not one people—ALL of ALL places and ALL times; despite ALL phoniness and self-interestedness coming FROM US—

My dear ones: the HIDDEN Heaven is ‘torn open,’ our Bah-ble sez! MEAN-ING: there is NOTHING se-pa-ra-ting our Source, our God, The Unknown, the Denied One, the Ignored One, the Despised One—DO...YOUR...WORST!—since the Baptism of our Lord by John, God has DELETED the gap between Him and us; even if US don’ know it yet!

LOOK at the ones to whom the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit ENTRUSTS (sic!) the Gospel of the King of the Jews risen from His crucifixion, risen from the dead: (I quote the end of the Gospel, Mark 16):

16 When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James,

and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?”⁴ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. ⁶ And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”⁸ And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Let’s just take a moment and PARSE this passage:

The women have been told—THREE TIMES—that the LAST PLACE they will find their Lord Jesus on the Third Day is among the dead. So, where do they go? The tomb.

AND, they’re worrying about moving the STONE!
The Stone? The Stone?

And when it mattered most—when ALL PHONINESS and self-interestedness HAD TO BE discarded; when Christ needed HIS...BEST...FRIEND most!—

⁶⁶ And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, ⁶⁷ and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, “You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus.” ⁶⁸ But he denied it, saying, “I neither know nor understand what you mean.” And he went out into the gateway^[h] and the rooster crowed.^[i] ⁶⁹ And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, “This man is one of them.” ⁷⁰ But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, “Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.” ⁷¹ But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know this man of whom you speak.” ⁷² And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, “Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.^[i]

WHO took away Simon Peter’s attachment to his BFF? A servant girl, and some people. Saint Peter’s attachment to the Beloved Son can take ANYTHING the world throws at him—until it’s little lispig Lulu; and then some other guys. Then it is: “I swear to the broken Sky

above—may I die and rot in Hades, if I even KNOW this man!”

And the young man at the empty tomb declares, ‘Now make sure THAT GUY hears about Jesus risen from the dead! If there’s ANYONE heaven needs on board, it’s THAT PHONY!’

And then—AC...CORD...ING to our Bah-bul, my dearies—WHOM do the women tell? No one! It’s all to scary; trembling scary.

All right:

I’ve been a pastor too long now; going on 30 years. ‘Lord, have mercy on us all!’

And I’ve heard from men and women just about as many lies and phony boasts as my doctors have heard from me myself! ‘Yes, I’ll get to the gym. Yes, I’m serious about the diet this time. Cookies? I don’t know that word!’

‘Yes, pastor, I’ll get to Church! Yes, baptized my little ones, and they’ll be around to hear the word of the Lord.’

Or, every Sunday morning—sorry to be so personal and rough, my friends—‘I do not love God or neighbor as required; and I am truly sorry about it.’

OK, my friends: If we ARE torn up about our performance, when’s it going to change?

Or is the change we need most in others? Or, better, in heaven itself?

Rejoice! Be glad! Hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ and leave behind your grave and its stench of guilt too!

OUR baptism at Christ’s authority is the breath of heaven, the pledge of the God we cannot begin to know, that the time of the Judge of each conscience looking to US to be pleased is O-VER!

Instead, Heaven has poured ALL of His Love, His Smile, His Heart, His Attachment into the PHONIEST MAN Who's ever lived among us! Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee!

He jumped into that water as if He was just like all the others there. He was play-acting TWICE OVER!

Not only was He NOT un-attached to His Father above; He also had no interest in making any fancy religious showing to convince God or man of his sincerity.

Thus, John called Him 'greater!'

Thank the Lord and sing His praise! Tell everyone what He has done! Let all who seek the Lord rejoice and proudly bear His Name!

The GOSPEL is GREATER than the Law? So says the last gasp of the Law, John.

The LAW, our BEHAVIOR, our RESOLUTION, OUR attachment to God or our fellow man is not worthy to stoop down and untie the lace of the sandal of the Man whose confidence in heaven's backing is A GIFT!

So, my dear ones: why do you and I despair? Because we're not any different from any man, deep down, atheist or super-duper religious: we think so little of the water the Spirit prizes so much!

And why is the next man so blown out of proportion as un-bearable; ESPECIALLY when he's just about a photo image of ourselves? Again, because we refuse to listen to Gospel-Jesus OR to Law-John! We think the Law, behavior, fearful living, boasting, preening, play-acting, is stronger than the Dove and His Pledge and His Water.

Which is where I'm going to leave you today: the Water.

When my mother yelled out to correct her OTHER children—not me, of course!—that when washing their hands before dinner, 'This time, use SOAP!'—

Mom meant for my disobedient siblings to rub a dry bar of soap over their hands before dinner, right?

Nope—put the soap WITH the water!

When the Baptizer says that HE washes with water, but the greater one washes with the Holy Spirit, there is no doubt he was putting the two together!

So, do YOU have heaven's good pleasure? Do YOU have the Spirit of God living in you?

Well, were you washed with water and the Word, the Authority of the Greater One? Then you have all the Holy Spirit you'll ever need!

And who's to say the next man is not well-pleasing to heaven too? If it's all a gift to US?!—then, whom does the Lord NOT want in the river with Him?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! Amen!