

## The Baptism of the Lord – January 13, 2019 – Good Shepherd Parish

### Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated; indeed, she has received from the hand of the LORD double for all her sins.

A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Go up on to a high mountain, Zion, herald of glad tidings; cry out at the top of your voice, Jerusalem, herald of good news! Fear not to cry out and say to the cities of Judah: Here is your God! Here comes with power the Lord GOD, who rules by a strong arm; here is his reward with him, his recompense before him. Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.

### Psalm: Ps 104:1b-2, 3-4, 24-25, 27-28, 29-30

R. (1) O bless the Lord, my soul.

O LORD, my God, you are great indeed!  
you are clothed with majesty and glory,  
robed in light as with a cloak.  
You have spread out the heavens like a tent-cloth;

You have constructed your palace upon the waters.  
You make the clouds your chariot;  
you travel on the wings of the wind.  
You make the winds your messengers,  
and flaming fire your ministers.

How manifold are your works, O LORD!  
In wisdom you have wrought them all—  
the earth is full of your creatures;  
the sea also, great and wide,  
in which are schools without number  
of living things both small and great.

They look to you to give them food in due time.  
When you give it to them, they gather it;  
when you open your hand, they are filled with  
good things.

If you take away their breath, they perish and  
return to the dust.  
When you send forth your spirit, they are created,  
and you renew the face of the earth.

### Scripture Reading: Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

Beloved: The grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age, as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people as his own, eager to do what is good. When the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, He saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

### Gospel: Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

The people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ. John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

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### Prayer to St. Michael

St. Michael the Archangel,  
defend us in battle.

Be our defense against the wickedness  
and snares of the Devil.

May God rebuke him, we humbly pray,  
and do thou, O Prince

of the heavenly hosts,

by the power of God, thrust into hell

Satan, and all the evil spirits,

who prowl about the world  
seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

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### **INVITATION TO PRAY**

*Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.*

### **Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.**

As you listen to the gospel be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

### **INVITATION TO REFLECT**

Sunday marks the last day of the Church's Christmas season. Jesus' birth has now been celebrated. His public life comes next. His baptism begins it. I know, I know, Christmas has been over for ages and we have gone on with life. The American custom is in force: just days to rip down decorations and go on to the next thing. But now we begin Jesus' public life, beginning with Baptism. We hear the voice of God the Father speaking to him: "You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased" (Gospel). Wouldn't Jesus or anyone else want to hear such words over and over? The beloved of God! It is like having candy and circuses and ice cream and all your favorite things. God has settled upon you as his special one. *Everything will be fine.* Except that "being fine" does not turn out to be the true meaning of being beloved. Let me illustrate with a story. I was visiting a Jesuit friend of mine in Washington DC, Pete, who is a prankster. He was in the kitchen cooking up homemade spaghetti. Icky mess. I asked him what time we were due to be somewhere or other, and he said "I don't know, but we can ask Joe." Joe was another Jesuit who on that Saturday was working at his job at an official Jesuit building. Pete put the kitchen phone on its speaker and floured in the phone number. Joe answered and Pete said, "hi, how are you doing, Joseph?" Joe said, "just great." Pete said, "how wonderful, since you are spending your weekend working." Joe came back semi-humorously and said, "No it is ok. God told me everything was going to be fine." Without skipping a beat Pete said, "Yeah that's what he told his Son." I was on the floor laughing at such a quick, piercing reply, seemingly delivered with no forethought at all.

But notice what is behind that joke. God does in fact tolerate pain and suffering for his beloved son on the cross. This is the other side of being "The Beloved" of God. Suffering and temptation. Jesus had gone to the desert to ponder the words he heard from the Baptist. But there the devil offered huge, slick temptations: be big, like me. Build up your earthly power and honor, use your new public status as "Beloved." This was directly and deeply contrary to Jesus' mission, of course, but God let such a temptation happen. Why? Well, God is like a parent watching a teenager's growing pains. Help all you can, but definitely do not stop the growing. Temptation and suffering create an urgent need for a person to open up, to broaden their scope, to understand better what love is, to see that love does not mean God taking charge and making everything alright, but rather it means his staying with you, the beloved, continuing to love and admire you, but not just taking over. Love at its root means *sharing another's life*, not taking it over. To paraphrase the Father's words at the Jordan: Receive my love that never runs away, never lets go, even in the desert, even on the cross.

### **INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING**

1. Wastelands, deserts, rugged land and rough country (Isaiah 40). Could these words describe terrorism in our world today? Election politics? Your spiritual life? Does this reading suggest that there is help in fixing these or do we/you just have to accept it?
2. Did we do anything to earn salvation? Why does God give it to us? What does St. Paul in his letter to Titus say about the extravagance of God's gift to us?
3. John the Baptist was the middleman. He pointed back to Isaiah and forward to Jesus, connecting the whole plan. What or who are the "middlemen or women" who connect you with God? Can you serve as a middle-one?

### **INVITATION TO ACT**

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

### **CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY**

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Almighty, ever-living God, who, when Christ had been baptized in the River Jordan and as the Holy Spirit descended upon him, solemnly declared him your beloved Son, grant that your children by adoption, reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, may always be well pleasing to you. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen