



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER
ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH
CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

January 10, 2016

Introduction to the Word:

Not that long ago my nephew and I were travelling together and I decided to take the 407. To be honest it was because I was running a little late and wanted to make up some time. Once we got on the 407 the bumper to bumper traffic of the 401 was a distant memory. Even my nephew noticed it and responded – “this is a “super highway!”

Baptism offers us the off ramp to a super highway to know the one who Himself told us: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” This event at the Jordan was a *profoundly significant moment* in the history of Israel, in the story of Jesus, and in the lives of all His followers. Our mission—empowered by our Baptism into Christ, and identified with Christ is to carry out Christ’s mission to all peoples. Today’s readings spell out for us the dimensions of this vision and mission but they also, as we end our Christmas celebrations, lead us to ask ourselves what we have been doing since our Baptism – what has your move been?



For this reason we begin a message series which will span the next four weeks entitled “Your Move.” Its goal and purpose is to lead us in reflecting, especially as we begin this New Year, upon the call of Discipleship and the fulfillment of our Baptism...how have we been acting as “beloved” in the Lord?

Warm-Up:

If you were asked to identify one or more of your "major successes," (i.e., accomplishments, challenges, or artistic endeavours) in your lifetime thus far, what would they be? Take a moment to think about this, then share one or two of your observations. You are given permission to “toot your own horn.”

CALL TO PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

Leader: Born again of water and the Spirit, we celebrate our victory over sin.



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*Lord Jesus, you came to bring justice and peace to the nations,
Christ Jesus, you free us from our sins and teach us how to forgive,
Lord Jesus, in our own baptism, you commission us for ministry,*

*Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.*

Let us pray together our Heart to Home Prayer:

*God Our Heavenly Father, we long to make our thoughts your thoughts,
and our ways your ways. As we prepare with attentive mind and open heart
to hear your Word Lord, we long to be empowered with your Spirit
so that we may bring your Word to our families, our parish and our communities.
This, our prayer, we make through the intercession of Our Lady of the Visitation and in name of
Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

(Please select one person –not including the leader – to take a turn at reading the scripture passages below.)

FIRST READING (Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11)

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her, that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep. The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING (Titus 2:11-14, 3:4-7)

Beloved: The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds. For when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.



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GOSPEL (Luke 3:15-16, 21-22)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke. Glory to you, O Lord.

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I, is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the 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 Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” The Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

(Allow a few minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection on a meaningful word or thought)

COMMENTARY:

[Your group may wish to listen again to the Audio of the Lord’s Day Message](#)

[At this point please use the video Message for this series – Week #1](#)

Today’s readings again are so rich in meaning that it is difficult to do justice to them in a few paragraphs. In Isaiah’s poem (First Reading) written in the eighth century before Jesus, Isaiah is the voice of one crying in the wilderness, and in this sense he foreshadows John the Baptist. In today’s gospel, it is John the Baptist who then became “*the one crying in the wilderness.*” He is the prophet chosen to announce the coming of Jesus as Messiah. His is “the voice in the wilderness” and his good news message about Jesus, who will “make straight in the desert a highway for us. The uneven ground will be made level, and the rough places, a plain.” John announces, “Behold the Lamb of God!” We can now look at Jesus and say, without any doubt, “Here is our God.” Isaiah continues, “He will feed His flock like a shepherd...He will gather His lambs in His arms.”

The Baptism of Jesus served as a gesture of humility and submission of Jesus to God and to the ministry of John the Baptist. This showed the humanity of Jesus and His submission to the will of the Father. The baptism of Jesus serves as an example to others. Jesus asked all those who would follow Him to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mathew 28:19). Jesus did not ask us to do something He was not willing to do.

And after the Baptist sees the “dove” (the Holy Spirit) and hears the voice of the Father, “This is my beloved Son!” (one of the first suggestions of the existence of the Holy Trinity). John proclaims, “This is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!” And three years later, Jesus is the “Lamb” sacrificed on the altar of the cross on Good Friday, dying for the sins of all mankind.



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This was a core moment of Jesus' public life and the experience that enabled Him to know who He was. Through all that He would have to endure, He could say after God called Him "my Son, the Beloved", "*I am the Beloved of God, others may leave me but God will never leave me.*" And fortunate for us, we are able to make the same statement of ourselves because we also have been baptized—into Jesus' dying and rising; we also are graced by Jesus' own Spirit, welcomed as children of God and pronounced "Beloved".

The movement toward Baptism, for Christ and for us, comes after God's knocking. For a parent to choose to baptize their child, or an adult to choose Baptism for themselves, it comes after the Lord has gently knocked on their heart. During the Christmas Season as a parish our messages have led us to become more aware of this knocking, for not only has company knocked, neighbours knocked and family knocked on the physical doors of our life, but God has been knocking on the spiritual door of our soul and heart and asked to have Dominion. He has asked us to cast our cares upon Him.

[Pause here and listen to this song, it is our theme for this series](#)

In order for this to be so, for us to Cast our Cares upon the Lord as we begin this New Year and seek faithfulness to our Baptismal Call, we must be a people who seek first to Trust His Voice, after all we would never open a door to one we do not know, "Stranger Danger" as our Kids Zone (aged 2 & 3) children say. Second we must be willing to LISTEN to what God will's for us truly is. This takes humility and docility to His purpose for us – it means our "resolutions" are not our own, they are His. Thirdly, it requires us to LOOK, to look at what areas of our life, what relationships, what habits God is seeking us to "dusty off", be open to, or close the door to, in our life.

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord calls us:

- To know God's voice – as good (Trust)
- To choose to Listen to God's voice (Obedience)
- To desire to look upon God's will for us and let Him have dominion in 2016 (Humility)

God is knocking...it's your move!

Message this week – God continues to knock – even past the Christmas Season, upon the door of our heart. His greatest invitation is for us to "cast our cares" on Him so that He can mold us into His beloved Child. Our move entails **trusting His voice, choosing to Listen and seeking to Look** at His resolution for our year and life. He is knocking now...it's your move.

*(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)*

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: (15-20 minutes)

Don't forget the three questions on our Video



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1. Reflect upon the words of the Father, and consider them spoken to you as they were to Jesus: “_____ [Insert your name] you are my beloved Son/Daughter, in whom I am well pleased.” (Gospel) What at times takes us away from feeling “beloved”? How can we respond to that and seek to eliminate that from our life – to “cast our care on Him”?
2. Sometimes life halts us from trusting His voice, choosing to Listen and seeking to Look, what are some reasons for this? Speak personally or generally. How can we respond to that and seek to eliminate that from our life – to “cast our care on Him”?
3. (Luke) “...and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying...the Holy Spirit descended upon Him.” According to Luke, prayer is connected with the gift of the Spirit and occupies an important place in the life of Jesus.

Your group members are invited to reflect on the occasion and/or times of prayer in your lives, both formal and informal. What are your favourite prayers? To whom do you most commonly direct your prayers? What “prayer habits” have you adopted that contribute to your prayer life, personally and as family?

Intercessions:

Leader: *Let us offer our intercession in the name of Jesus, the Son, the Beloved, with whom God was well pleased.* The response is: “Lord, hear our prayer”.

For the Church

That the baptized people of God may give witness to the love of the Father in union with our Holy Father, the Bishops and our Pastor, we pray ...

For the World

That in the face of violence and war especially in the Middle East and North Africa, believers may speak God’s tender word of comfort and herald the salvation of God to all, we pray...

For those Oppressed, Afflicted or in Need

That those who have strayed from their baptismal commitment, especially any members of our families, may find Christ to be the shepherd who carries them safely home, we pray...

For the needs of the local community

That young people preparing for First Holy Communion, teens preparing for Confirmation and parents bringing their children for Baptism, may embrace fully the commitments of these Sacraments in their lives as God’s beloved sons and daughters, we pray...

Leader: Let us seek the intercession of the Patroness of our Parish as we pray: [Hail Mary](#)

Closing Activity and Prayer (15-20 minutes)

(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. You may wish to create and add petitions of prayer at this time. This time also intent to provide moments to connect and “outreach” to the larger community.)



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GROUP PRAYER/ ACTION:

- Review together the [Parish Mission Statement and Values](#) (no it will not be boring to do), where does your small group fit in? How can your Baptismal call be expanded upon as we seek to build upon our values : *Eucharistic Spirituality, Hospitality and Welcome, Evangelization, Faithfulness to Who God Made Us To Be and be connected to our past, committed to our future and compassionately focussed on being a Family of Faith with something for everyone.*"
- Choose one action together as a group you will do this week which will seek to **trusting His voice, choosing to Listen and seeking to Look.** Here are some ideas:
 - ✓ Choose as a group to spend some time in Eucharistic Adoration in our Chapel (maybe individually or as a group praying to be better able in His grace to make Your Move).
 - ✓ Choose individually this week to journal briefly about what it means to be a “Beloved Child of God” and how you want to make your move this year to feel more like one.
 - ✓ Choose individually or as a group this week to list the cares you will cast upon the Lord this year – let His knocking resound - cast your cares on Him.

Let us pray (together)

As we celebrate today the mystery of Jesus’ baptism in the river Jordan,
renew in us our own baptism: Pattern our lives on Christ,
the Son on whom your favour rests, the Beloved with whom you are well pleased.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son
who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever. Amen.

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