

Date Preached	09-Jan-2022	Date Initiated	28-Dec-2021
Where Preached	SAK	Appointed Readings	Epi 1, Yr C (B'm / OLJC)

" the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove "



It's funny how the subconscious mind works. As I turned to the lessons for today and read again St Luke's account of the Baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan, my thoughts suddenly snapped back to my ordination to the priesthood in this very nave some sixteen months ago. It remains a great fortune and deep joy of my ministry with you that even during a pandemic—and even with vaccines still several months in the offing—we were all able to share in that most sacred and most special occasion: "sacred" and "special" *not* in the sense that I myself had done or deserved anything ... but in the sense that at the moment of my consecration, with Bp Laura's hands laid upon my head, the Holy Spirit descended upon this place, bestowing divine grace and power, and in the words of the ordination rite, "made [me] a priest of [God's] Church" (*BCP*, p 533).

Now, I would *never* equate my lowly, common ordination and Jesus' Baptism; or even compare them in any but the most general of ways. Nevertheless, the superficial similarities my mind suddenly saw while I was reflecting on today's Gospel lesson ... between what happened here sixteen months ago ... and what took place at the Jordan some two millennia ago ... set me wondering, anew, *why* Jesus was baptized and what His Baptism *effected*.

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In none of the Gospels, including Luke's, do we get much information about Jesus' life—other than His birth—before He begins His ministry. And so, we are left to wonder about His upbringing, His education, His family and friends, His training and work as a carpenter ... even His religious life. We might make some educated guesses based on what we know, generally, of Jewish culture in first-century Roman Judea, but we're as likely to be wrong as right. <sup>1</sup>

*Whatever* His life to this point, it is clear, in Luke's telling, that Jesus experiences *some* sort of transformation this day at the River Jordan. Something of a religious fervor, tended to by John the Baptist, has broken out in Galilee, and people are flocking to John to receive a baptism of repentance for their sins. Jesus appears to get swept up in this moment and goes to be baptized

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<sup>1</sup> Moreover, any guesses we did make would necessarily be confounded by the Incarnation: by the fact that within Jesus' fully human body and existence also dwells full divinity, for He is God from God, Light from Light. We cannot know how much Jesus' human nature is conscious of His divine nature, either before He begins His ministry or during it. In summary, theological positions on this point range from the (heretical, in my view) assertion that Jesus was really no more than a gifted and/or charismatic only-human moral leader to the belief that Jesus was, at all times, fully conscious of His divinity. My own take on all of this, following St Paul in Philippians 2:5-11, is that the Second Person of the Godhead (the Word; the Light), dwelling in Eternity, elected to come physically into this world and take on full human vesture, as Jesus. He was thus conscious of His own divinity, but, in base humility, He suspended or laid aside consciousness (but not the *fact*) of it ... at least until He began His earthly ministry. (To me, Jesus' own predictions of His Passion (*e.g.*, in Mark 8, 9 and 10) indicate at least an *awareness* of His own divinity; at least a *general* knowledge that He is both of and from the Father.)

Himself, despite His being without sin. Following His immersion in the Jordan waters, Jesus begins to pray.

What takes place next seems something of a commissioning; we might even call it an *ordination*, which is to say, an *or-der*-ing: Jesus is placed in *another order*.<sup>2</sup> Something *in ...* or *of ...* or *about ...* Him changes when the Holy Spirit literally descends upon Him—'lays hands' on Him—and He hears the voice of the Father saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." The *physical touch* of the Spirit and the *spoken words* of the Father turn the course of Jesus' life: lift Him to a higher calling ... make Him aware of the grace with which He has been filled since His birth. These acts initiate Him into the ministry—the now-conscious and -conspicuous ministry—that has been His destiny from the Manger. He now knows ... and knows *the Father* knows ... that He has come into this world to do the work of God, with and for the People of God. He has been ordained—*re-ordered*—into a new way of existing; into a ministry of love and servanthood; of mercy and sacrifice.

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The presence of the Holy Spirit and transformation by and through the grace of God: These are the cardinal elements ... the very essence ... of Jesus' Baptism, and they are present in all seven of the Church's sacraments,<sup>3</sup> but perhaps **in** none more directly and more fundamentally than Baptism:

- The presence of the Holy Spirit is invoked upon the waters of the Font.
- Hands are laid upon us, we are "sealed by the Holy Spirit."
- And having thus been forever transformed—forgiven all our sins and raised to "the new life of grace" in Christ—spiritual gifts are bestowed upon us: "an ¶inquiring and discerning heart; ¶the courage to will and persevere; ¶a spirit to know and love [God]; and ¶the gift of joy and wonder in all [God's] works" (*BCP*, pp 307-08).

The Holy Spirit ... the laying on of hands ... a life-altering transformation ... and bounteous gifts of grace: Baptism is, at root, an ordination: It is *our own ordination*. All of us who have been baptized have been ordained into the holy order of the laity<sup>4</sup>: Each and every one of us has been *re-or-der*-ed from sin into redemption; from creaturely existence into glorious grace; from child-of-flesh into sibling-of-Christ.

And if our baptismal ordinations echo that of Our Lord's, then what flows *from* our Baptisms should resemble what flows from *His*. Jesus, now conscious of the Father's calling and pleasure in Him; now emboldened by the Spirit's ever-presence, fully turns to God's mission: to teach ... to heal ... to comfort ... to confess<sup>5</sup> ... to forgive ... to feed ... to free ... to honor ... to dignify ... to give ... to correct ... and, above all else, to worship and to pray: all *transitive* verbs; all actions that have *objects to receive* the blessings and benefits of His baptismal ministry. Newly baptized ... newly

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<sup>2</sup> It is probably a step too far to say that Jesus, always fully divine, has been *entirely* devoid of the Spirit or *wholly* ignorant of His being the Son of God before this.

<sup>3</sup> See *BCP*, pp 857ff.

<sup>4</sup> See *BCP*, p 855 (the ministers of the Church are "lay persons, bishops, priests and deacons"; *i.e.*, four orders).

<sup>5</sup> *I.e.*, in both senses of the term: to confess our faith and (in our case, but not in His) to confess our sins.

ordained to His God-given order ... Jesus plunges into the world to share with it the fruits of His ordination: all that the Holy Spirit has enabled, to the fullest measure of God's grace.

And so, too, for us. As the baptized ... as those who have been ordained to the holy order of the laity ... we, too are called to bless and benefit the world. We, too, are called to bear fruit; to seize the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives ... to grasp the glorious gift of God's grace ... and visit upon this world the love and the hope and the mercy and the joy of Jesus, one transitive verb after another. For the ministry to which the Holy Spirit has ordained *us* in baptism ↓ is nothing less than Christ's very own.



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