

# Fr. David's Weekly Newsletter



December 2, 2011

## Second Sunday of Advent • He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit

Almighty and merciful God, may no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste to meet your Son, but may our learning of heavenly wisdom gain us admittance to his company.

### On the Prayer of Jesus

This week, the Holy Father began to look to Jesus and to His prayer, which runs through the whole of His life like a secret channel irrigating His existence, His relationships and His acts – and which guides Him with steady constancy to the total giving of Himself according to God the Father's plan of love. Jesus is also the Master for our prayer; indeed, He is the fraternal and active support each and every time we turn to the Father. Truly, as a title from the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church summarizes it, "Prayer is fully revealed and realized in Jesus" (541-547).

A particularly significant moment along His path is the prayer that follows the baptism He submitted to in the Jordan River. The Evangelist Luke notes that Jesus – after having received baptism at the hands of John the Baptist together with all the people – enters into an intensely personal and prolonged prayer: "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" (Luke 3:21-22). It is precisely this "praying" in conversation with the Father that illumines the action He accomplished together with so many from among His own people who had come to the banks of the Jordan. By praying, He gives to his baptism an exclusive and personal character.

The Baptist had issued a strong appeal to live truly as "sons of Abraham" by converting to the good and by bearing fruit worthy of such repentance (cf. Luke 3:7-9). And a great number of Israelites were moved – as the Evangelist Mark records, who writes: "And there went out ... [to John] all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by Him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins" (Mark 1:5). The Baptist was bringing something truly new: submitting to baptism had to mark a decisive turning point – a leaving behind of behavior tied to sin and the beginning of a new life.

Even Jesus welcomes this invitation – He enters into the grey multitude of sinners who wait



*Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.*

along the banks of the Jordan. However, as in the early Christians, so also in us the question arises: Why did Jesus voluntarily submit to this baptism of repentance and conversion? He had no need to confess sins – He had no sin – and therefore He had no need of conversion. Why then this act? The Evangelist Matthew reports the Baptist's astonishment: "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" and Jesus' response: "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all justice" (Verse 15). In the biblical world, the word "justice" means to accept the Will of God fully. Jesus shows His closeness to that portion of His people who, following the Baptist, acknowledge the insufficiency of merely considering themselves children of Abraham – but who want also to do God's Will, who want to devote themselves to making their conduct a faithful response to the covenant God offered to Abraham.

Therefore, in descending into the river Jordan, Jesus – who is without sin – visibly manifests His solidarity with those who recognize their own sins, who choose to repent and to change their lives; He makes us understand that being part of God's people means entering into a renewed perspective on life – lived in accordance with God.

In this act, Jesus anticipates the Cross; He begins His activity by taking the place of sinners; by taking upon his shoulders the weight of the guilt of all mankind; by fulfilling the

Father's Will. By recollecting Himself in prayer, Jesus manifests the intimate bond He shares with the Father Who is in Heaven; He experiences His paternity; He welcomes the demanding beauty of His love – and in conversation with the Father, He receives confirmation of His mission. In the words that resound from Heaven (cf. Luke 3:22), there is an early reference to the Paschal Mystery, to the Cross, and to the Resurrection. The divine voice calls Him "My Son, the Beloved" – recalling Isaac, the well beloved son whom Abraham his father was ready to sacrifice in accordance with God's command (cf. Genesis 22:1-14).

Jesus is not only the Son of David, the royal messianic descendent, or the Servant in whom God is well pleased – He is also the Only-Begotten Son, the Beloved – similar to Isaac – whom God the Father gives for the salvation of the world. In the moment when, through prayer, Jesus profoundly lives His own Sonship and the experience of the Father's Paternity (cf. Luke 3:22b), the Holy Spirit descends (cf. Luke 3:22a) – [the Spirit] who guides Him in His mission and whom [Jesus] will pour forth once He has been lifted up upon the Cross (cf. John 1:32-34; 7:37-39), that He may illumine the Church's work. In prayer, Jesus lives an uninterrupted contact with the Father in order to carry out to the end the plan of love for mankind.

The whole of Jesus' life – lived in a family profoundly tied to the religious tradition of the

people of Israel – stands against the backdrop of this extraordinary prayer. The references we find in the Gospels demonstrate this: His circumcision (cf. Luke 2:21) and His presentation in the temple (cf. Luke 2:22-24), as well as the education and formation He received at Nazareth in the holy house (cf. Luke 2:39-40 and 2:51-52). We are speaking here of "about thirty years" (Luke 3:23), a long period of hidden, daily life – even if marked by experiences of participation in moments of communal religious expression, like the pilgrimage to Jerusalem (cf. Luke 2:41).

Certainly, Jesus' teaching on prayer comes from the way He learned to pray within His family, but it has its deep and essential origin in His being the Son of God, in His unique relationship with God the Father. The Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church responds to the question: From whom did Jesus learn how to pray? in this way: "Jesus, with his human heart, learned how to pray from his mother and from the Jewish tradition. But his prayer sprang from a more secret source because he is the eternal Son of God who in His holy humanity offers His perfect filial prayer to His Father" (541).

In our prayer also, we must learn increasingly to enter into this history of salvation whose summit is Jesus; to renew before God our personal decision to open ourselves to His Will, and to ask Him for the strength to conform our will to His.

# JOHN THE BAPTIST TRIVIA CHALLENGE

## 1. What archangel foretold the birth of John the Baptist?

An archangel appeared to John the Baptist's father and spoke of the coming birth of a son.

- a. Raphael                      b. Gabriel                      c. Michael                      d. Uriel

## 2. Who was John the Baptist's mother?

John the Baptist's mother was Mary's cousin. Mary visited her in the event called the Visitation.

- a. Esther                      b. Rachael                      c. Elizabeth                      d. Magdalene

## 3. Who was John the Baptist's father?

John the Baptist's father was a priest who ministered in the Temple in Jerusalem.

- a. Zachariah                      b. Hezekiah                      c. John                      d. Charlie

## 4. How long was John the Baptist's father unable to speak?

John the Baptist's father doubted the words of the angel, and was unable to speak for a period of time.

- a. one year                      b. one week                      c. five months                      d. nine months

## 5. How many brothers and sisters did John the Baptist have?

- a. 7                      b. 2                      c. He was an only child                      d. 10

## 6. Where did John the Baptist baptize Jesus?

- a. Mississippi River                      b. Mediterranean Sea                      c. Dead Sea                      d. Jordan River



Answers: 1. b; 2. c; 3. a; 4. d; 5. c; 6. d.



# BAPTIST

# JOHN THE

**Across**

- 2. John's coat was made of the hair of this animal
- 5. The name of the river where John baptized people
- 6. This Sunday's Gospel comes from this book of the Bible

**Down**

- 1. John the Baptist told people to do this
- 3. The number of candles we light on our Advent wreath this week
- 4. This season of our liturgical year, when we wait for Jesus' coming at Christmas

