

The Baptism of Our Lord – 2022

Isaiah 43:1-7

Romans 6:1-11

Luke 3:15-22

Moses stared at a bush. It was burning but it was not consumed. The Lord was there, making that place holy by His presence. The God of Creation appeared to Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. “Moses, Moses!” A deliverer; the Lord God Almighty was commissioning a deliverer for His people who were in bondage. God’s presence created a holy space and Moses was to **recognize it**, he was to show **reverence, humility, respect for it**. “Take your sandals off your feet for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5).

Holy ground; Abraham took his son, Isaac, up Mt. Moriah. God the Father had His own Son in mind when He said this to Abraham: “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (Genesis 22:2). Isaac, on the way up the mountain, asked the simplest, the most innocent of questions. “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” (Genesis 22:7). Abraham, the man of faith, answered in faith. “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son” (Genesis 22:8). Abraham stared a ram, caught by its horns in a thicket. God had stayed Abraham’s hand. Isaac was not to be the sacrifice. God had another plan all along. It is not Isaac’s blood that would make holy ground.

Mt. Moriah, the same place where God provided the sacrifice, that is where the Temple was built (2 Chronicles 3:1). Holy ground; the blood of sacrifices offered for the sins of the people saturated the ground. The blood of atonement, carried by the High Priest into the Most Holy Place on Yom Kippur, sanctified the people. “For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the Lord from all your sins” (Leviticus 16:30). The Temple – it was holy ground. God shared His holiness with those who had none of their own. God’s presence made the Temple holy. Blood and sacrifice and atonement and a holy space – that’s what He wanted; **a holy space to occupy, a place to make His own, a place where His kingdom reigned.**

You are holy ground. You are the Temple of the living God. This is no theological fiction. This is not a flowery religious Hallmark moment – it is the bold and beautiful and brilliant blueprint of God sharing His holiness. God’s holiness has invaded this earthly domain and found its target, found you. A determined pursuit; over hill and dale, through fire and tempest, God has pursued you with the intent of making you His Temple. How did this come to be? Oh, you need to know! Christian that you are, you need to know what God has done to make you His Temple. To value it, to treasure and protect it, to take delight in it and marvel at its beauty, to marvel at His love, you need to know. How did you come to be the Temple of the living God? That is the story of the Christ.

The apex of salvation is that God became man. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). That’s the bridgehead of God’s holiness coming into this world. The Son of God tabernacled in our flesh – He is the fulfillment of the OT Temple. The flesh of the Son of Mary is God’s holy domain. In the flesh of that Man, God is determined to share His holiness with the

entire world. He is in solidarity with you, with me, with sinners. To save you, He takes your place. John is baptizing sinners, washing them in the Jordan River. Sin must be punished. God is just and sin must be punished. One Man will bear it all. That is the story of Christ. He is the One Man – and He is baptized. As the Christ, He is ordained in that water. As the Christ, He will bear man's sin. As the Christ, He will be punished. Down into the water He goes. He is being baptized into His own death.

Why is He being baptized? As the Son of God, He is pure, holy, sinless. He has no sins to repent of. He has no need of washing. He begins His ministry by having sins washed *onto* Him. He begins to shoulder the burden of man's iniquity. He was made man for the purpose of bearing your sin. It begins in the Jordan. "For our sake God made him who had no sin to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). It begins at the Jordan. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). It begins at the Jordan. Down into the Jordan He goes. He is being baptized into His own death. In the Jordan water, Jesus sets His face toward Jerusalem. A baptism in water tethers Him to a baptism in His own blood (Luke 12:49-50). He takes your place. At Calvary, He takes what is yours with the promise of giving you what is His.

God punished sin. God hates it. Sin violates His nature, violates His holiness. Sin corrupts His creation. Sin brings death where God had created life. Sin is a wedge between God and man. Love; those He loves are the ones who sin. And God is just; He is just and He is merciful. Cruelty and lust and pride and covetousness and thievery and idolatry and all that profanes His holiness – God hates sin and He punished it. All of God's righteous fury against sin was poured out on One solitary figure, one sacrificial lamb, one Man. That you might be the Temple of the Living God, the Lord Christ was hung on a tree. Alone, He bears the punishment that you deserve. Alone, He suffers the judgment of God. The ground was Calvary. The blood of God poured from Jesus' body. Payment, atonement, a sacrifice to end all sacrifices; mercy; Jesus dies and the curtain in the Temple is torn in two. Heaven is opened. The Spirit which Jesus received in Baptism He gives up in death. It is finished.

And here you are, a creature of God's creation. Here you are, an object of God's love, a sinner in need of mercy. His eternal blueprint calls for you to be His Temple, calls for you to bear His Spirit. You've been baptized. The blood which Christ shed at Calvary, God Almighty has tucked that very blood into the water with which you were baptized. Washed in His blood, you are holy. The Spirit which Jesus gave up in death, the Spirit which He poured out on the church at Pentecost, God gave to you when you were baptized.

Now, imagine if Moses had disregarded God's command. "Hey, my sandals are good enough for the fields of Midian, they are good enough for this place." What would you call that? Defiance? Self-righteousness? Belligerent repudiation of God's grace? Whatever it is, it's something much more sinister than cluelessness, something much more active than mere indifference. Have you dishonored God's holiness? Have you soiled yourself with drink, with pornography? That has to stop. Have you taken His name in vain, have you used profane language and brought shame to the Spirit who lives in you? That has to stop. Have your ears become addicted to cultural refuse, gutter ideas streaming from gutter mouths that are instruments of gutter minds? That has to stop. "What partnership has righteousness with

lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?" (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

You are Holy Ground. The Vine of Christ and Him crucified feeds the branch of your soul (John 15:1-8). You are holy and precious in His sight. His blueprint is your salvation. His ministry is active and productive and present. "He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap" (Psalm 113:7). He makes even us holy. Christ the King keeps us holy. Because you are holy you are an epiphany to the world. Light and Life are in you. Your life is anchored to Christ therefore you are an instrument of hope and love and forgiveness and truth and mercy. You are holy. Christ's blood, rich and full of divine life, has washed you. These are all of a piece: Holy Scripture, Holy Communion, Holy Baptism, One Holy Christian and Apostolic Church, the Office of Holy Ministry, and Holy you. This Holy Space, Christ's Holy Presence, and Holy You. You are Holy Ground.