



Jan.13, 2019 [Lk. 3: 15-16, 21-22](#) & Is: 40: 1-5, 9-11

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[More Fr. Beck](#) (With permission)

Stone, Naomi. [Mystery of the Universe](#)

Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [On Blessed and Cursed Consciousness](#)

[New Melleray Monastery Sunday Homilies](#)

[God's Story: John the Baptist](#)

ENTERING THE SCENE:

Fr. Rolheiser says: Let's begin with the positive, a blessed consciousness: We see this in Jesus, in how he perceived and in how he judged. His was a blessed consciousness. As the gospels describe it, at his baptism, the heavens opened and God's voice was heard to say: "This is my blessed one, in whom I take delight." And, it seems, for the rest of his life Jesus was always in some way conscious of his Father saying that to him: "You are my blessed one!" As a consequence, he was able to look out at the world and say: "Blessed are you when you are poor, or when you are persecuted, or suffering in any way. You are always blessed, no matter your circumstance in life." He knew his own blessedness, felt it, and, because of that, could operate out of a blessed consciousness, a consciousness that could look out and see others and the world as blessed."

This is what we are included in when we also were baptized.

Lk. 3: 15 The people were full of **anticipation**, wondering in their hearts

whether John might be the **Messiah**. 16 John answered them all by saying: "I am **baptizing** you in **water**, but there is one to come who is **mightier** than I. I am not fit to **loosen** his **sandal strap**. He will **baptize** you in the **Holy Spirit** and in **fire**."

7 His winnowing-fan is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.' 18 And he proclaimed the good news to the people with many other exhortations too. 19 But Herod the tetrarch, censured by John for his relations with his brother's wife Herodias and for all the other crimes he had committed, 20 added a further crime to all the rest by shutting John up in prison.

21 When all the people were being **baptized**, Jesus was **baptized** too. And as he was **praying**, heaven was opened 22 and the **Holy Spirit** descended on him in bodily form like a **dove**. And a voice came from heaven: "**You are my Son**, whom I love; with you I am well **pleased**."

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Jesus was baptized and set apart to do God's will. How does my baptism do the same for me?

PRAYER: Beloved son, you entered the waters of inspiration made holy by God's Spirit. You accepted the full reality of this unconditional love so deeply that you dedicated all that you are, that I might also know this same truth. Help me at those times when I can't believe this 'too good to be true' revelation. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION;

ANTICIPATION: Anticipation can be dreadful or exciting, or both. Now that God is once again giving the people a prophet in John, the hopes that the 'Messiah' was near and was even present in John himself.

Try to imagine the excitement that hearing John's message might have caused. Have I ever lived on 'tiptoe' waiting for something? How did it feel?

MESSIAH: The Samaritans thought the Messiah was the one to bring all truth. The Jews thought the Messiah would lead them out of servitude to Rome and to autonomy. The Qumran community thought there would be two Messiahs, one to take care of religious concerns and another to take care of political issues.

If I was listening to John that day, which of these definitions do I think I would have chosen?

BAPTISM: Baptism for John was a moment of turning around and looking at everything in a new way.

How has my understanding of my baptism helped me to do that?

WATER: Water, in the rite of baptism symbolizes a dying to an old way of being, and a rising to a new way of being in the world.

John used the medium of water for his baptism. If I had been there that day, do I think I would have gone into the water to be baptized? If so, why? If not, why?

MIGHTIER: John was impressive, both in his message and in his person. He fit the image of someone who could organize and lead the people to their freedom.

When the people went home that day after listening to John, what image do I think they might have had of the one who was coming? Might that image have gotten in the way when I encountered Jesus? Why?



LOOSEN SANDAL STRAPS: This was a task of the lowest slave in the service of a master.

Would this have added still more power to the image that people would have gotten from John's preaching? How does that compare with what people experienced when they walked and talked with Jesus?

HOLY SPIRIT: In the Hebrew Scriptures there was a concept of the holiness of God's spirit, but until Pentecost, the people would not have experienced it personally.

What do I think the people listening to John that day imagined the Holy Spirit was? How do I define this

reality today?

FIRE: Fire consumes, purifies, refines, changes one thing into another, and is a form of energy.

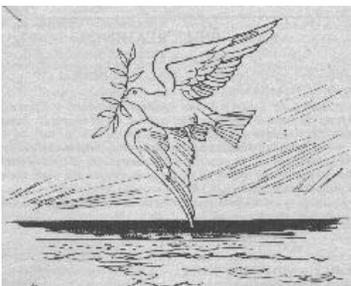
Compare a baptism of water with a baptism that has both water and fire. What does adding fire add to the experience?

PRAYING: Luke's gospel often has Jesus praying, often he even has to slip away to do so.

Have I ever wondered why Jesus needed to pray? Where do I slip off to in order to pray?

HOLY SPIRIT: God's spirit is now spoken of as the Holy Spirit.

How does adding the word 'holy' change my understanding of spirit?



DOVE: Reaching clear back to the receding waters of the flood we find a dove as a messenger.

What makes a dove a good messenger?

YOU ARE MY SON: Receiving the confirmation of being a beloved son enables Jesus to begin his public ministry.

What enables me to reach out to share my gifts with others in ministry?

PLEASED: Knowing that you please the beloved is its own reward

When was the last time I experienced such a reward?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Lk. 3: 15 // Mt. 3: 11f; Mk. 1: 7f; Acts 13: 25; Lk. 3:21 // Mt. 3: 13-17; Jn. 1: 32f; Lk. 3:22 // 2 Pt. 1: 17;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Is. 42: 1-4, 6-7; Ps: 29: 1-5; Acts 10: 34-38; Lk. 3: 15-16, 21-22;

Revised Common Lectionary: Is. 43: 1-7; Ps: 29; Acts 8: 14-17; Lk. 3: 15-17, 21-22

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

We are familiar with the role of the Spirit in the beginning of Acts, with Peter's explanation just after, using the scripture from Joel (Acts 2:15-21). What is less obvious is that Luke begins his Gospel similarly. His account of the baptism highlights the role of the Spirit, and subsequently, in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus explains this, using the book of Isaiah (Lk 4:17-19). In what way can it be said that Luke highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in his account of the Baptism (3:21-22)? If you look at his description carefully, noting its differences from Matthew and Mark, you can see some of this. First of all, a striking feature of Luke's approach is to position the story of John's arrest before the baptism (3:19-20). Mark, for instance, gives us the baptism first (Mk 1:9-11), and then the arrest of John (1:14). Luke apparently wants to get John out of the way (as the last figure of the former covenant) before Jesus takes the stage. But it leaves him with a problem. Who will baptize Jesus? He solves that problem in two ways. First, he relates the baptism as having taken place in the past, before the arrest of John. Secondly, he doesn't mention John at the baptism, since this would surely raise questions about sequence — something that hasn't bothered most people, until someone like me points it out. Luke would just as soon not draw attention to it himself. Omitting mention of John, it leaves the Spirit as the main actor on stage in the baptism account. Subtle, but definite. If we knew only Luke's version, and didn't have the other gospel versions in our heads, it would be immediately apparent. [Fr. Robert Beck](#)

The Baptist was an eschatological prophet, who saw himself entrusted with the task of persuading his fellow Palestinian Jews to revert to a life of justice in preparation for God's approach. We are told that he was surrounded by a circle of disciples among whom figured Jesus (Mark 2:18; Matthew 9:14; Luke 5:33; John 3:25). Jesus no doubt inherited from the Baptist his leading ideas, first and foremost

the need of repentance for those who seek the kingdom of heaven. We learn from the Fourth Gospel that the original disciples of John complained about a rival group of Jesus' followers, but were silenced by their master (John 13:22-30). In fact, Jesus was not competing with John, and it was only after the imprisonment of the Baptist that Jesus launched in Galilee the penitential campaign initiated by John in the Jordan Valley (Mark 1:14; Matthew 4:12). Pg. 7.
Shanks, Hershel. Partings. Washington DC. Biblical Archaeology Society. 2013.

When parents have their children baptized they indicate their desire to have their children grow up and live as children of God and brothers or sisters of Jesus, and be guided by the Holy Spirit. Through birth a child is given to parents; through baptism a child is given to God. At baptism the parents acknowledge that their parenthood is a participation in God's parenthood that all fatherhood and motherhood comes from God. Thus baptism frees the parents from a sense of owning their children. Children belong to God and are given to the parents to love and care for in God's name. It is the parents' vocation to welcome their children as honored guests in their home and bring them to the physical, emotional, and spiritual freedom that enables them to leave the home and become parents themselves. Baptism reminds parents of this vocation and sets children on the path of freedom. Henri Nouwen

John the Baptist is the prophet who rejects the status quo without apology, eats the harsh food of that choice, and wears alternative clothing (why else do they take so much time describing it!) outside his own system of religion and culture—when his mom and dad were of the priestly class (Luke 1:5-6). He even changes the venue for transformation from the authorities (Matthew 21:23-27)
Richard Rohr

Where there is love, there is God. If we make love the predominate message of our lives, we will not only be speaking about love, we'll be speaking about God. We'll be proclaiming God and God's message -- truly the prophets that we were anointed to be at our baptism. Bp. Thomas Gumbleton

Thus, through his baptismal experience, Jesus discovers his identity as Son, the continual presence of the Father in his life, the power of the Spirit who dwells in him, and his mission to be achieved through the proclamation of his kingdom and through suffering. In other words, from within his deepest identity he discovers a mystery to be revealed and a mission to be accomplished by himself. Pg. 44. Olivera, Bernado. OCSO. The Sun at Midnight. Collegeville, MN. Liturgical Press. 2012

The Holy Spirit is the point of contact between God and ourselves. The Holy Spirit gives us a transfusion of divine life by which we live spiritual lives. Whereas the Holy Spirit is God as Gift, the human spirit is creature as receptor, the vehicle created by God within the human person that is able to receive the Divine Persons. Through the Holy Spirit, God breathes out. Through our spirits, we breathe God in. Pgs. 12-13.

The more we realize the Spirit within us, the more we become who we are, namely, partakers of the divine nature where this “second nature” is existentially the source of actions. Pg. 156.

The Spirit interiorizes what the Word unveils. Pg. 212.

Goergen, Donald. Fire of Love: Encountering the Holy Spirit. NY. Paulist Press. 2006..

You see, transformed people transform people, and John's little offbeat ritual down by the riverside (outside of the temple where his father served) has become for us the very symbol of Christian transformation. Richard Rohr

We are told that St. Francis used to spend whole nights praying the same prayer: “Who are you, God? And who am I?” Evelyn Underhill claims it's almost the perfect prayer. The abyss of your own soul and the abyss of the nature of God have opened up, and you are falling into both of them simultaneously. Now you are in a new realm of Mystery and grace, where everything good happens! Notice how the prayer of Francis is not stating anything but just asking open-ended questions. It is the humble, seeking, endless horizon prayer of the mystic that is offered out of complete trust. You know that such a prayer will be answered, because there has already been a previous answering, a previous epiphany, a previous moment where the ground opened up and you knew you were in touch with infinite mystery and you knew you were yourself infinite mystery. You only ask such grace-filled questions, or any question for that matter, when they have already begun to be answered. Richard Rohr



Even John the Baptist expected the messiah to come with that kind of power. His concern was justice, repentance, asceticism. He warned people of an approaching time of reckoning and expected the longed-for messiah to come precisely as a violent fire, a winnowing fan that would separate the bad from the good and burn up the former with a righteousness that came straight from God. When he heard reports of Jesus gently inviting sinners in rather than casting them off, John was scandalized, that kind of a messiah didn't fit his expectations, or his preaching. That's why Jesus, in sending a response to him, invites John not to be scandalized in him. John hadn't wanted a gentle, vulnerable, peace-preaching messiah. He wanted bad people punished, not converted. But, to his credit, once he saw how Jesus' power worked, he understood, accepted a deeper truth, stepped back in self-effacement, and pointed people in Jesus' direction with the words: He must increase and I must decrease. I'm not even worthy to untie his scandal strap!

A newly published Dead Sea Scroll fragment links the baptismal dove with the spirit of God hovering over the waters in Genesis 1:2. Allison, Jr. Dale C. *The Baptism of Jesus and a New Dead Sea Scroll*. *Biblical Archaeology Review*. March/ April 1992. Pages 58ff.

The early church fathers believed that Jesus purified the Jordan (river of life) when he was baptized in its waters. Robin Jensen asks; [What Are Pagan River Gods Doing in Scenes of Jesus' Baptism?](#) In the Feb. 1993 issue of *Bible Review* on pages 35ff. This article deals with the timeless human tendency to take what is known and integrate it into what it is learning that is new.

In his baptismal experience, Jesus discovers anew his identity of Son, together with the continual presence of the Father in his life, the power of the Spirit dwelling in him, his mission to save through suffering, and the message of the Kingdom. In other words, he receives a mystery to be revealed and a mission to be accomplished out of his own deepest identity. Pg. 353. Olivera, Bernardo, O.C.S. O. *The Search for God: Conference, letters, and homilies*. Kalamazoo, MI. Cistercian Pub. 2002.

In a work that argues for the rational acceptance of the truth of the gospels called *Origen: Against Celsius* we find: in chapter 40 a mention of the descent of the dove at Jesus' baptism. Ehrman, Bart. [After the New Testament](#). NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 1998. Page 90.

Baptism means immersion. If our mission as Church is to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Spirit, it means to discover and help others to discover the immersion of God in our world, or rather, that our world is immersed in God. Fr. David Bock

It was not forgiveness so much as the dramatic once-for-all conversion which John's baptism symbolized which was new. William Loader

In a mid 2nd century document called [The Gospel According to the Ebionites](#) we find in chapter 4 the following: And after many other words it goes on: "After the people had been baptized, Jesus came also, and was baptized by John. And as he came out of the water, the heavens opened, and he saw the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove and entering into him. And a voice was heard from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son, and in you am I well pleased.' And again, 'this day have I begotten you.' And suddenly a great light shone in that place. And John, seeing him, said, 'Who are you Lord?' Then a voice was heard from heaven, 'This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.' There at John fell at his feet and said 'I pray you, Lord, baptize me.' But he would not, saying, 'Suffer it, for thus it is fitting that all should be accomplished.'" Ehrman, Bart. [After the New Testament](#). NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 1998. Pages 135-6.

To Matt. 3:13 cf. [Gospel according to the Hebrews](#), (in Jerome, *Against Pelagius* III.2)-The mother of the Lord and his brothers said to him, "John the Baptist baptizes for the forgiveness of sins; let us go and be baptized by him." But he said to them, "In what have I sinned that I should go and be baptized by him? Unless, perhaps, what I have just said is a sin of ignorance."



Pouring out the Jordan from a jug, at left, a smiling river god of the classical type watches Jesus' baptism. This ivory panel from a casket probably dates to between 425 and 450. It may have originated in Milan or Rome. www.biblereview.org

[The Gospel of Nicodemus](#): Chap. XIV. 1 Adam causes Seth to relate what he heard from Michael the archangel, when he sent him to Paradise to entreat God to anoint his head in his sickness. But when the first man our father Adam heard these things, that Jesus was baptized in Jordan," he called out to his son, Seth, and said, 2 Declare to your sons, the patriarchs and prophets, all those things, which thou didst hear from Michael, the archangel, when I sent thee

to the gates of Paradise, to entreat God that he would anoint my head when I was sick.

Lk. 3: 15: Some regarded John as the Messiah. 16–18: (Mt 3.11–12; Mk 1.7–8). Holy Spirit, see 1.15n., Acts 2.1–4. 18: Good news, 1.19n. 3.19–20: John's imprisonment (Mt 14.3–4; Mk 6.17–18). Herod Antipas divorced the daughter of the Nabatean king in order to marry Herodias, his niece, who had divorced his brother, Herod Philip. Josephus (Ant. 18.5.1) provides details. Jewish law prohibited marrying one's brother's wife (Lev 18.16; 20.21). Rebuked, on "rebuking" (Heb "tokhei h.ah"), see Lev 19.17; b. Tamid 28a; Gen. Rab. 54.3; Sifra 89a–89b. 3.21–22: Jesus' baptism (Mt 3.13–17; Mk 1.9–11). 21: Praying, indication of Jewish piety (5.16; 6.12; 9.18,28; 11.1; 22.32,41–46). Heaven was opened, Isa 64.1; Ezek 1.1; 2 Bar. 22.1, indicating direct divine revelation. 22: Holy Spirit, see 1.15n. Voice came from heaven, Heb "bat qol" ("daughter of the voice"), a rare means of divine communication (e.g., b. B. Metz. 59b; see also Lk 9.35). Son, suggesting Isa 42.1; Ps 2.7. For Jewish messianic interpretation of Ps 2, see Pss. Sol. 17.23–24; 4QFlor. 3.23–38: Jesus' genealogy (Mt 1.1–17).

Luke Levine, Amy-Jill & Brettler, Marc Zvi. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#). NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 2011 Pg. 105.

But to grasp one's own life responsibly and live it lovingly and freely according to the graced pattern given as gift by the contemplation of that same gospel, is the height of Christian holiness. James P. Doyle

To be baptized means to make the passage with the people of Israel and with Jesus from slavery to freedom and from death to new life. It is a commitment to a life in and through Jesus. Henri Nouwen

Baptism is more than a way to spiritual freedom. It also is the way to community. Baptizing a person, whether child or adult, is receiving that person into the community of faith. Those who are reborn from above through baptism, and are called to live the life of sons and daughters of God, belong together as members of one spiritual family, the living body of Christ. When we baptize people, we welcome them into this family of God and offer them guidance, support, and formation, as they grow to the full maturity of the Christ-like life. Henri Nouwen

“If fire, penetrating the mass of iron, sets the whole aflame, and what was cold becomes hot, and what was black becomes bright – if the body of fire penetrates the body of iron, why do you wonder, if the Holy Spirit enters into the inmost parts of the soul?”
St. Cyril of Jerusalem

But according to Francis, “a lay person has the strength that comes from baptism and his lay vocation is not negotiable. The way I see it, clericalism prevents lay people from growing,” the Pope added. And this “is a two-way temptation because clericalism would not exist if there weren’t any lay people who wanted to be clericalised.”

SELECTED READINGS:

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Grana, Janice, Ed. Images. Winona, MN. St. Mary’s College Press. 1976. **The Son Who Must Die:** Pg 183-4.

Shea, John. Stories of Faith. Chicago. Thomas More Press. 1980, **The Reality of the Future:** Page 142.

http://www.ted.com/talks/robert_wright_the_evolution_of_compassion.html