

Baptism of Our Lord 2015

In our first lesson we are pulled back in time to a point almost before time - "*in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth*". A time when the Lord looked down upon earth and saw only formlessness and empty - "*without form and void*", towu wa bohu, literally chaos and nothingness, and "*darkness was over the face of the deep*". Not a place for life. A wasteland, worse than a wasteland. And yet "*the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters*", and God spoke... and brought light, and order, a place for life, and then life! And it was good! "tov"

Fast forward to the beginning of the Gospel of St. Mark, and begins in the wilderness, the wasteland, dry and dead, but not just the landscape and setting where John the baptizer is baptizing the Jews in a baptism of repentance, but the wasteland was over all life. The state of the world had not "tov" anymore. The towu wa bohu, chaos and nothingness, has come back, the world not a place where life thrived like it should. No. But the biggest wasteland was the human state of spiritual death which lead all to rebel against the Creator, and to die.

Yet, in the place of towu wa bohu, God acts, once again over the formless and void, the darkness over the deep, the pit of death that swallows up all humanity forever. Once again the Spirit hovers over the waters, coming down in the form of a dove, and the Father speaks His Word to create a new creation in the midst of the formless and void – but this time all centered on this one man Jesus of Nazareth.

In Jesus' Baptism is God's greatest epiphany – revelation – so far: Here is God in the flesh. "At Christmas God appears as man, but now in Epiphany, this man appears before the world as God." (TDP) God almighty focused in upon this one man: Jesus. The voice of God, the Father, speaks and says, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased." And the Holy Spirit descends in the form of

a dove.

What an epiphany! Here God for the first time clearly shows us who he really is: the Father, His beloved Son, and their Holy Spirit. One God, yet three persons in an eternal union of love. Not even Moses who spoke to God daily knew Him so fully and truly.

And yet what an awesome and fearful sight! God showing Himself. He is not puppy god, no buddy Jesus, no pal around and joke, no casual god, the same God who spoke light and life into existence and formed by His Spirit – here, on earth! The same God who simply by speaking caused the entire nation of Israel to wail and moan in terror, begging that He would not speak to them, lest they die of fear. This same God, here, showing himself! What a truly terrible sight.

And yet, amazingly, we see Him now not in terror as on Mt. Sinai, or in sheer power as in the beginning, but concentrated in this lowly man, Jesus, and coming upon him in the form of a dove, the sign of peace, as if to say, here is my peace offering, I come not as a warrior to destroy you rebels and destroyers of my creation, but to make peace!

And look where this God who manifests Himself is found! In the dirty water with sinners. The same water into which John the baptizer preached them to repentance, the same water in which God promised to wash away the sin of those who confess and believe: here is Jesus, in the same muddy waters with all that nasty sin. He's there with all the sinners, not to judge and destroy them as they truly deserve, as true justice would demand, neither to ignore or shrug off their very real sin, but to take it upon Himself! He goes amongst the sinners because he has come to become a sinner that through him the many will be made righteous. St. Paul: "he became sin who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God."

So where is God found? Here is this man Jesus, upon whom His Spirit

comes and remains. Where is Jesus found? Jesus is only found among sinners, not among the righteous, for those who are well need no doctor. He comes down into that dirty water and soaks in all that sin upon himself, so that he might become the greatest sinner on earth, taking all our sin upon himself already in his baptism! This is the second great epiphany from the Lord's baptism.

He gets dirty in the water, and makes it clean for you and me. Jesus didn't need to be baptized, he did it for you, so that he might take all your sin and guilt and death and rebellion and bound will that loves sin, and that he, by his pure body make the water of baptism holy for us forever. That we might, when we are baptized, be washed by the one who by his baptism made baptism in His Name a life-giving holy bath of new life.

And this is what happened in your baptism, and what happens every time anyone is baptized. God looks down and sees the towu wa bohu that is you and me, the formless void, the chaos, the darkness over the deep of our bodies, marked by death forever, and He sends down His Spirit and speaks His word and there is Jesus in that water making it a *“washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying.”* (Titus 3:5-8)

“This voice ought to be listened to with the most profound attention and be treasured up in our hearts and should always be present before our eyes...to ever hear that gladsome voice: 'Here you have him, my Son, my heart, my richest treasure, my all, even myself.'” (M. Luther) Confident and consciences at rest and secure in the midst of all trials and even death itself, know that those who rely upon Christ's word and work have a loving and gracious Father, and ain't nobody can take that away, no trial, no poverty, no sickness, no tragedy, no loss, nothing.

