

Have you ever been asked the question, “So, are you pleased with yourself?” If your experience is like mine, at least sometimes it was asked in a mildly sarcastic tone. The key is the add-on, “with yourself.” It may be okay to be pleased, but to be pleased with oneself connotes pride, smugness, and self-absorption. It is one thing to be pleased with a situation, but people recoil if we appear to be too pleased with ourselves. Humility is an essential attribute of the spiritual life, and it flies in the face of a culture that places such a priority upon achievement.

It may come as a bit of a surprise when, with respect to our passage from Isaiah, the voice comes from the Lord saying: “Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased.” Both in Isaiah and also in today’s Gospel, the servant is not speaking of himself, but it is the Lord who is pleased. “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” It carries with it no retinue of self-absorption, but only a recognition that the servant is carrying out the will of the Lord.

Christ demonstrated utter humility in undergoing Baptism. He did not need to do so, for he was sinless. By completely identify himself to the frail human condition, we in turn can better identify the suffering servant, our Savior. His Baptism was vicarious in nature, that is, he did so in our stead. We the Baptized, were immersed with Christ, and with him, we were buried again. Still, we desire nothing more than to be pleasing to the Lord, clean and pure in His sight.

The Baptism of the Lord in the Jordan marks the beginning of his public ministry. The private phase of his life, the “hidden life” so to speak, is over. And it never returned again. He began his life in humility in the manger in Bethlehem, ended it in public humiliation through death on the Cross. He remains even now, our servant, reigning from heaven, yet in our service. Jesus’ Baptism is present in every celebration of Mass.

We are immersed in His death and resurrection, the heavens open and the Bread from heaven descends into our hearts and souls. Many of the Fathers of the Church saw Jesus' Baptism as the institution of the sacrament of Baptism. His Flesh blessed the water, and the Father's being "well pleased" became the signal that his public ministry was to begin.

In our Gospel, the people were filled with expectation— something was going down, to use the popular phrase. And what was it? First off, people were waiting in expectation of Baptism by John, wondering if **he might be** the Messiah. His was a Baptism of repentance. We all want to be freed from sin; we want to be cleansed.

Luke hints that Jesus waited in line like others in the crowd, yet John intuited immediately that there was something unique, something more at hand. At the Jordan, Jesus manifests extraordinary humility, recalling both the poverty and simplicity of the manger, while also anticipating the humiliation of the Cross.¹

Jesus rises up out of the water, as affirms St. Gregory Nazianzen, and "sees the heaven opened which Adam had shut against himself and all his posterity."² As of this moment, Christ began his work as the new Adam.

Today brings to a close the beautiful Christmas season. I thank all musicians, servers, lectors, cantors, creche and flower volunteers who made Christmas so special this year. Those joining us online or on the radio remain close to us.

The joy and hope of this season was evident, reminding us that we now need to bring this message of joy and hope to a broken world. On account of our Baptism, we too have work to do. It has just begun.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, homily for Baptism of the Lord, 10 Jan. 2010

² Gregory of Nazianzen, *Discorso 39 per il Battesimo del Signore*, PG 36