



BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Year C
January 13, 2019

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11
Psalm 104:1b-2, 3-4, 24-25, 27-28, 29-30
Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7
Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

Assembly

(An unlit candle, a Bible opened to this week's gospel and an image of the Holy Spirit as a dove rest on a cloth-covered table in the meeting place.)

Beginning Prayer

(The candle is lit. Members are invited to silently focus on God's presence. After a short time of reflection, members alternate reading the following prayer aloud.)

All: O bless the Lord, my soul.

I: O LORD by God, you are great indeed!
You are clothed with majesty and glory,
robed in light as with a cloak.
You have spread out the heavens like a tent-cloth;

All: O bless the Lord, my soul.

II: You have constructed your palace upon the waters.

You make the clouds your chariot;
you travel on the wings of the wind.
You make the winds your messengers,
and flaming fire your ministers.

All: O bless the Lord, my soul.

I: How manifold are your works, O LORD!
In wisdom you have wrought them all—
the earth is full of your creatures;
the sea also, great and wide,
in which are schools without number
of living things both small and great.

All: O bless the Lord, my soul.

II: They look to you to give them food in due time.
When you give it to them, they gather it;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

All: O bless the Lord, my soul.

I: If you take away your breath, they perish and return to the dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth.

All: O bless the Lord, my soul.

Psalm 104:1b-2, 3-4, 24-25, 27-28, 29-30

LISTEN TO THE LORD

(The leader passes out copies of the scriptures. The scriptures are read aloud with a pause after each reading. After the gospel is read, the leader invites members to choose a few words from the gospel that touch them.)

*The leader asks these two questions with a pause between them: “**What does this gospel say to you?**”, “**How does this gospel affect you in your life?**” The community silently reflects on these questions. The leader invites members to share their thoughts about the Insights and Reflection Questions for the week in a single group or within smaller groups.)*

Insights

In this week's gospel, the Holy Spirit makes a physical appearance in the form of a dove. The dove is mentioned often in the Bible in both the Old and the New Testament. After the great flood, Noah sent both a dove and a raven from the ark to help him determine if the swollen seas had receded enough to expose land. The raven never returned, but the dove eventually did bearing an olive branch which indicated there was land nearby. When the dove appeared at Noah's ark carrying the olive branch, it represented God's promise to mankind that he would never flood the Earth again. Today, the dove holding an olive branch symbolizes peace and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In this Old Testament story, the Holy Spirit appears in the organic form of a dove to communicate with Noah. The dove is white symbolizing purity; it is a peaceful bird and flies with its wings spread forward and upward as if flying towards heaven. It is a sign of God's presence.

At the time of Jesus' baptism, the dove descended from heaven to Jesus. When the heavens opened up above Jesus the people who witnessed this would have known they were in the presence of God. After hearing God's voice speaking from heaven, the people would have been initially stunned, and then reverent. It would have been a clear sign to all who witnessed it. God's chosen Messiah was not John, but Jesus. The people would have had no doubt who the Christ was.

The Holy Spirit works in many ways, not all of them are as direct as these stories from the Bible. We can be like the dove filled with the Holy Spirit. We can allow the Holy Spirit to use our bright light, peaceful heart, pure thoughts and our ability to help others move forward and upward. Let your inner dove fly!

Reflection Questions

- ◆ Have you ever witnessed the Holy Spirit working among your friends, family and community? When?
- ◆ What does the symbol of the dove represent to you?
- ◆ How does the presence of the Holy Spirit affect you in your daily life?

Suggestions for Action

- ◆ Honor the peace and purity of the Holy Spirit. Plan a retreat with church members that focuses on improving inner and outer peace.
- ◆ Reenergize your connection to Jesus. Spend a day contemplating how Jesus has made a difference in your life. Share what you discover with someone else.
- ◆ Fly upwards like the dove. Pray for those who have wronged you in some way. Pray to God to take away any anger or resentment you may still harbor towards them.

HEAR THE LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing, the leader poses these questions: “How has the sharing from this session affected you?”, “How will it change you this week?” The leader allows a moment for members to reflect before inviting them to share their thoughts. The leader reads a selection from the readings aloud. Following the reading, the leader poses these questions to the members: “What is Jesus saying to you?”, “What is your response?” The community pauses to reflect on these questions. A brief instrumental selection may be played during this time. After a time of reflection, the leader invites members to share what they hear Christ saying to them.)

Closing Prayer

(The leader plays the song "Baptize Me Holy Spirit" found at www.insights-books.com. Click on the Music link and select the appropriate week. After the song is complete, the leader and a member pray as follows.)

God's Only Son

Leader: Waist high in the sea,
 water poured down his head
In front of his brethren,
 his humanness shed.

I: John exclaimed to those gathered,
 he was not the one.
Another stood ready,
 God's only Son.

Leader: The heaven's broke open
as Jesus prayed,
revealing God's pleasure,
in the Son he had made.

I: John served as witness,
to the Holy Spirit's descent.
The body of a dove,
it's spirit heaven sent.

All: Amen.

(Members exchange a sign of peace. The candle is extinguished.)

