



## Baptism of the Lord, Cycle C

Fr. David Rosenberg  
Institute for Spiritual Direction

This year we hear Luke the Evangelist's spiritual perspective of the Baptism of Jesus. His emphasis departs somewhat from Mark's version, on which Luke's account is based. The primary effect of the changes is the diminishing role of John the Baptist as Jesus begins his ministry.

Luke elucidates that John the Baptist was what scripture scholars call the "*bridge*" prophet. He brings to completion the Old Age and the sealing of the Old Testament canon, and ushers in the beginning of the New Age as foretold by the prophets of old in the prophecies of the coming of the Messiah. The "*bridge*" between the two ages comes between the two sections of this reading. Once Jesus is baptized, John is not mentioned again. As we are reminded in the gospel of John 3:30 "*He must increase; I must decrease.*" Starting with the beginning of this reading John's role diminishes. Luke had to make clear to the disciples of the time that John was not the messiah, leading to John's clear statement of this fact.

Luke then presents us with the formula for Trinitarian Baptism, focusing attention on the Gift of the Spirit, which marks the new era, rather than on the act in which John played a role. It is the presence of the Spirit and the voice from heaven that Luke wants us to remember.

Another feature common throughout Luke's account was Jesus in prayer, especially here when the Spirit is to come upon him. Luke often speaks of Jesus praying before making major decisions, reminding us that his baptism was a defining moment in his own coming of age and his growing awareness of his mission. Jesus' experience of prayer and the descent of the Holy Spirit will be a model for the future Church at Pentecost, called to carry on the mission Jesus accepts at his baptism.

As you reflect on this passage, consider the impact of Luke's perspective in his laying the cornerstone of our Church's Teachings on the Trinitarian Baptism -- the unmistakable presence of the Trinity as the Spirit descends and the voice of the Father from heaven. The voice from heaven compels us to reflect on Isaiah 42:1, "*Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.*"

Let us further reflect on John's humility in his acceptance of the priority of Jesus, "*...one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals.*" It is good for us this week to pray to likewise empty ourselves of any misdirected priorities to which we cling, and in humility take on the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

*A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke.*

The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.  
He went into all the region around the Jordan,  
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.  
As the people were filled with expectation,  
and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John,  
whether he might be the Messiah,  
John answered all of them by saying,

*"I baptize you with water;  
but one who is more powerful than I is coming;  
I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals.  
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."*

Now when all the people were baptized,  
and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying,  
the heaven was opened,  
and the Holy Spirit descended upon him  
in bodily form like a dove.

And a voice came from heaven,  
*"You are my Son, the Beloved;  
with you I am well pleased."*

*The Gospel of the Lord*