



Be Baptized

*First Sunday after the
Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord,
Mark 1:4-11*

*In the beginning God created the
heavens and the earth. Now the earth was
formless and empty, darkness was over the
surface of the deep, and the Spirit of
God was hovering over the waters.
And God said, "Let there be light," and
there was light.*

*God saw that the light was good, and he
separated the light from the darkness. God
called the light "day,"
and the darkness he called "night."
And there was evening, and there was
morning—the first day.*

January 1, 2018

Thought for the Week

Scriptures - 2 Samuel 7:1-5/8b/12/14a/16, Romans 16:25-27, Luke 1:26-38

It has often occurred to me as I reflect on my own life, now that some 70+ years of it have passed, that if I could have known beforehand how my life and vocation would develop, I might well have been too frightened to make certain decisions. Perhaps it is just as well that I did not have such foresight because I am not a particularly heroic sort of person. Nonetheless, I did make certain critical choices and, amazingly, they turned out to be the kind that continued to send me in the direction I had chosen.

It is quite likely too, that's the way married people must feel as they celebrate their 50th anniversary. They made a certain decision along the way, the most important, of course, being to spend their days together as husband and wife. Nonetheless, during those long years together, as they reflect on it, they may occasionally have wondered how it would all turn out. Would they have decided to forge on ahead had they known what they know now? It is all a great mystery and they will probably never be sure.

It seems to me that those same thoughts must have been running through the mind of Mary, the young Palestinian virgin betrothed to a young Palestinian man named Joseph. At a certain moment before they were married, Mary experienced this strange sacred prediction that she would soon become pregnant. This was a great shock to her, of course, because of the great risk of public dishonor. Not only that, the mysterious messenger predicted that she would be the mother of a son who would follow in the historic ancestral line of the great king David. Can one imagine any more shocking prediction than that? Little did she realize that if she said yes to this invitation, it would change the whole course of her life, which, of course, it did. Nonetheless, she did reply, "yes". Once again, here is the great mystery: Mary did not have any idea of what the future would be and yet she was willing to risk whatever lay ahead.

What do you suppose was going through her mind the day she and the others in the family came out to where her Son was preaching, worried to death that he was putting himself in mortal danger with the Roman and temple authorities? Perhaps it

might have seemed to Mary that her son had become an extremist, a political radical. She obviously knew the power of the state and the temple to simply wipe out her son once and for all.

Moreover, what did she think when Jesus told her that his family had now expanded to include all those who listened to the word of God and kept it. One can only imagine today what mothers in Syria or those in Gaza or the West Bank must think when their son declares that he intends to become a suicide bomber. Think about that!

Of course, by that time Mary was already clearly aware what her initial “yes” meant. There was no turning around. The gospels tell us that she stood near the cross when her Son was being crucified; she never gave up on her Son whose life had become such a puzzle, such a mystery to her.

In some ways Mary’s life resembles that of many mothers and fathers today: think of the parents who answer the door of their home and are told that their son has been shot in gang-violence. Think also of the parents who answer the door to meet a military officer who tells them that their son has been killed in Iraq.

All one can say in those instances is that the parents could never have imagined such a tragedy happening to them when they first married. Nonetheless, they remained peaceful about it, knowing that they had done all they could to care for this son of theirs.

Mysteriously, we come to understand our own life better hindsight than foresight. In the end, as Paul writes, “we live by faith not by sight.”

So, after having read and listened so often to the stories in scripture, I am still a little frightened by this thought: what if Mary had simply said “no” to the angel’s invitation to be mother of the Savior? It was obviously her choice to make. Our great consolation is that we live in the midst of mystery and history. Happily in this instance, the decision of one person in history to say “yes” has touched the faith and life of Christians forever.

Happy Birthday Laura (12/27)

How do we receive the Holy Spirit?

The apostle Paul clearly taught that we receive the Holy Spirit the moment we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior. First Corinthians 12:13 declares, *“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”* Romans 8:9 tells us that if a person does not possess the Holy Spirit, he or she does not belong to Christ: *“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”* Ephesians 1:13-14 teaches us that the Holy Spirit is the seal of salvation for all those who believe: *“Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.”*

These three passages make it clear that the Holy Spirit is received at the moment of salvation. Paul could not say that we all were baptized by one Spirit and all given one Spirit to drink if not all of the Corinthian believers possessed the Holy Spirit are even stronger, stating that if a person does not have the Spirit, he does not belong to Christ. Therefore, the possession of the Spirit is an identifying factor of the possession of salvation. Further, the Holy Spirit could not be the “seal of salvation” (Ephesians 1:13-14) if He is not received at the moment of salvation. Many scriptures make it abundantly clear that our salvation is secured the moment we receive Christ as Savior.

This discussion is controversial because the ministries of the Holy Spirit are often confused. The receiving/indwelling of the Spirit occurs at the moment of salvation. The filling of the Spirit is an ongoing process in the Christian life. While we hold that the baptism of the Spirit also occurs at the moment of salvation, some Christians do not. This sometimes results in the baptism of the Spirit being confused with “receiving the Spirit” as an act subsequent to salvation.

In conclusion, how do we receive the Holy Spirit? We receive the Holy Spirit by simply receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior (John 3:5-16). When do we receive the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit becomes our permanent possession the moment we believe.